

Ba'th Socialist Party

A SURVEY OF THE BA'TH PARTY'S STRUGGLE 1947-1974



Unity Freedom Socialism



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Editor's Note

The Arab Socialist Ba'th Party regards all Arabs as being part of one nation both in the cultural and spiritual sense. The different countries in which they live, make up a politically and economically united fatherland. In the Party's documents, «the Arab fatherland» means all the Arab countries. Each of these is a «qotr» which, literally translated, means country; in the Ba'th context, it should be read as province or region. The adjective «qotri» (provincial, regional) is used when referring to an individual country. The adjective «qawmi» (national), on the other hand, is used when referring to all the countries which together make up the one fatherland. Thus, the National Directorate deals only with matters concerning the whole fatherland. Each Regional Directorate deals with matters within its own country. As for example, the Lebanese or Jordanian Regional Directorate etc.

The word Ba'th can be translated as meaning revival, resurgence or renewal. Hitherto, resurgence seems to be the meaning which is preferred by Arab intellectuals and foreign Arab experts.

Introduction

The background to the Ba'th Party's origins and its main features

When, in a society, the conditions for revolution become ripe, and when both the objective and subjective factors converge to a point which indicates that a new era is about to be born, all is ready for the coming into being of a genuine revolutionary movement. It has the opportunity to develop its own philosophy and organisation without having to be concerned with what already may exist. A movement of this kind can play an important historical role in giving a lead by drawing strength and inspiration from a deep understanding of the laws governing the current course of events, from its faith in the common people, its confidence in its principles and its clear recognition of the facts of life.

It was under these conditions that the Arab Ba'th movement came into existence towards the end of the thirties and was an expression of the intellectual trends then current amongst young Arab people. It was a period of tumultuous change throughout the world and at a time when conditions were ideal for the beginning of the Arab nation's movement for liberation.

Comrade Michel 'Aflaq, the founder of the movement, has described the motivations behind these trends as being: the realisation of the backwardness of the Arab nation, the recollection of a glorious past and the observation of the civilised world. They caused the fresh Arab revolutionary thinking to adopt a complete and radically different position and attitude towards the partition, colonisation, exploitation and bondage which were the features of the Arab condition. They were used as a means of reforging a vital creative link with the riches of the Arab nation's heritage and of stimulating a burning desire for a total renaissance which would place the Arabs on the level of the developed countries. The synthesis of all these elements made it possible for the nationalist revolutionary thinking to cut a clear path through the many existing political and doctrinal trends, which disagreed on many things but were the same in their lack of interest in one or any of these motivations.

Either they contented themselves with a recognition of the backward Arab condition and the observation of the civilised world and hoped to change it by techniques borrowed from abroad which they tried to apply to our situation; and whether from the right or from the left, they were Western techniques. Or, alternatively, they regarded the current decadent condition from the standpoint of the glorious past and took no account of the tremendous changes which had occurred in the world. As a result, they became prisoners of a conservative, traditional and often reactionary dream.

It was for these reasons that the Ba'th concept succeeded in supplanting all those trends in fashion at the time in the Arab countries, such as: conservative nationalism, disunited progressivism, internationalism

without national loyalty. The concept put forward a completely different solution for our nation's problems in the form of a unification based upon socialism and democracy, and a form of democracy which stemmed from social justice and the participation of the ordinary people. It also placed the struggle for national freedom into a universal context, linked it closely with the movements for freedom by all nations.

From early days, the Ba'th determined the methods it would adopt for a complete transformation of society. Its activities would be revolutionary and democratic, relying on the people and very highly organised. Its instrument would be a nation-wide organisation covering every Arab country. Its social base was to be the working classes which were looking for a united, socialist and democratic Arab society.

Because the Ba'th concept came into existence in a climate of confrontation, it has learned much from practical experience and is thereby capable of continuous development and renewal. The first members of the Ba'th, even before it was founded officially, began their struggle in this way. Its official foundation was more the crowning of its efforts to give the people its message and the direct action which it undertook, during the course of which the Ba'th movement took its shape and charted its historic path.

Chapter One

Before the foundation

(1941-1947)

The movement began in Syria and its first nationalistic action was to give support, in May 1941, to the first Arab revolution for freedom in Iraq. The early Ba'thists called upon Syrian Arab youth to join the Aid for Iraq Movement whose purpose was to uphold this rising for liberation. University students became increasingly interested in the debates organised by the Party's founder, especially those at the beginning of 1943. In November 1942, comrade Michel 'Aflaq and his colleague Salah al-Bitar had decided to abandon teaching and devote themselves completely to revolutionary activity and to the political and organisational work of the new movement. This decision not only had a positive effect on these activities, but was also a proof of the new movement's firm intentions.

It was in this way that the Ba'th started off at a time of anti-colonialist struggle and in the centre of the Syrian Arab people's movement for independence. From the very beginning the Party was able to bring out into the

open the longstanding complicity between the feudal and bourgeois classes and colonialism. They were its heirs in the region, which meant that political independence was devoid of any unified, democratic and progressive content. Under another guise, the region still was subjected to the imperialist pillage of its wealth, which belonged to the nation. During the Syrian electoral campaign, the Ba'th Party issued a declaration, on July 24th. 1943, on the agreement reached that year between the ruling National Block and England and France, which stated that: «it seemed to be an attempt to regain our sovereignty from the colonial powers, but, in fact, it was nothing of the sort».

The Party put forward its founder as a candidate in these elections and he obtained a respectable number of votes. His campaign was not of the usual type, for all he wanted was a rostrum from which to speak to the people about his ideas and programme. In fact, he said: «We are not in a hurry to come into power; we will be carrying on the fight for a long time». His election manifesto did not follow the conventional pattern of flattering words and promises to redress immediate wrongs; it presented the political platform of the Party and the novel methods which it would use, making the difference quite clear between the new movement and the current ruling classes and politicians who had lost the people's confidence. It stated: «The manoeuvres and tricks of the politicians are of no use for dealing with our grave problems and the extent of our illness. What is needed is a new generation of Arabs which is conscientious, well organised and militant and which has faith in the future of our nation».

Scarcely a few months after these elections, the

Lebanon underwent a difficult ordeal when it demanded its independence in November 1943. The Ba'th Party protested against the French attack on Lebanon's independence and called upon the population to view the country's cause as one which affected all Arabs and especially Syria.

It continued to combat the ruling National Block by denouncing its reactionary policies, its weakness towards the French authorities in particular, its venality, corruption and nepotism. The people's resentment against the government grew stronger and students organised demonstrations which usually made the government give way or resign.

The year 1943 was an important one for the development of the Ba'th movement's philosophy and organisation. Some of the most important articles were written defining the personal qualities and skills which would be needed by future Arab generations, the historical relationship between Islam and Arabism, the living vision of a cultural heritage, and the differences, both in theory and in practice, with communism. The most famous of them all was the discussion, led by the movement's founder, at Damascus University in April 1943, the date of the Prophet's birthday.

At the beginning of 1944, the Party's attention was focussed on the Palestinian question. Notes of protest were despatched to those American leaders who supported Jewish immigration to Palestine. Nevertheless this concern with Arab national causes, as evidence of its global political concept, did not prevent it from carrying on the day to day struggle with the reactionary Syrian regime. In February 1945, the Party published a strong article attacking the government's weakness in allowing

the French to take over the command of Syrian army units, and the familiar policy of lies, exploitation and repression. The article demanded the dismissal of those responsible for all these political setbacks.

The result was the arrest of Salah al-Bitar, one of the movement's leaders and his banishment to a village in the north-east of the country. At this provocation, the Ba'th militants called on the population to demonstrate in protest. The appeal was enthusiastically answered and the demonstration was enormous, even though the Party itself was few in numbers and with little authority.

In March 1945, the Ba'th clarified its viewpoint on the Arab League. It denounced the Charter and the inconsistencies of its basic positions which were designed to preserve the political divisions, gave scant attention to the countries in the Maghreb, and did not mention the Palestinian question or that of the usurpation of the province of Alexandretta. «The bad thing about it», the article stated, «was that it gave the impression to the Arab nation that this was what was meant by genuine unification».

At this period also there were violent clashes between Ba'thists and members of the Syrian Communist Party because the latter, as had been agreed with the Soviet Union, supported the French and the British as their allies. The most violent of these clashes was that of May 1 st. 1945.

On May 8th. the Party gave the Algerian people its support following the terrible massacre during the victory day demonstration on which the French authorities opened fire.

On May 16th, during the course of the negotiations between the French and Syrian governments and because

of the weakness and servility of the National Block and the shifts and evasions of the French, the Party published a statement demanding the breaking off of negotiations.

Under the turn of events and popular pressure the government publicly declared its rejection of and opposition to the French. The Party stated that «it would support it so long as it continued the national struggle against foreign aggression». Not content with just verbal support, the Party started organising its units for the «National Crusade» as a means of harnessing the people's movements. These units were of three types, resistance units, security units and rescue units. They did their duty when the French attacked Damascus and other towns on May 29th. 1945. This was the first experience of armed combat for the new movement. This was also the first time that the communiqué calling for the formation of these units was issued in the name of the Arab Ba'th Party, whereas previously they had appeared under the name of the Arab Ba'th Movement or the Arab Ba'th Bureau.

On July 10th., the Ba'th applied for official registration as a political party. The application included a résumé of the Party's principles and set out its objectives in 23 clauses. The government rejected the application.

In October 1945, the Arab Ba'th Movement published a political manifesto on the main problems facing the Arab nation. It confirmed the existing point of view and gave its support to certain unification projects such as that for the Nile Valley. It supported also the independence of the protectorates and emirates and their union with other Arab countries, the unification of Greater Syria on the basis of an Arab Palestine and the

republican government as a measure of Arab progress. The passage ended with these words: «The most important and decisive act to be born in mind on this matter of unification is the union of Syria with Iraq». It dealt also with situation in the Maghreb and Libya and raised the call to fight for the liberation of these countries.

In a telegram of protest against the treaty between Jordan and Britain, the Ba'th warned the Arab people to be on their guard and to fight against colonialism and its agents. It organised popular demonstrations and declared that the treaty «nullifies Jordan's independence, threatens that of neighbouring countries, sets back the progress towards unification and reinforces the aims of the Zionists».

During the same year, the Ba'th had supported Egypt in its fight for complete independence and the evacuation of British troops since it considered «that British policy is not only opposed by Egypt but by the entire Arab nation».

In 1945 the Party opened its first small office in the Canal district of Damascus.

On May 3rd. 1946, the Ba'th called a general strike at the arrival of an Anglo-American commission in Palestine which was proposing the immigration of 100,000 Jews and had refused to allow an Arab government to be set up. It was then that Michel 'Aflaq made his famous plea —«Let the Arabs not wait for a miracle. It is not the governments but the people themselves who will save Palestine».

In the second half of 1946, young Syrian Ba'thists fought two important battles for democracy. The first was concerned with the decree on the powers of the Home Affairs Ministry, giving it authority to dissolve

political parties, suspend newspapers and deport its opponents. Noisy and bloody demonstrations continued until the Constitution Committee ruled that the decree was contrary to the spirit of the Constitution. The second was against the undemocratic electoral law on the subject of indirect suffrage. In the following year, the Ba'th succeeded in having the law changed.

Likewise after a long fight, the Ba'th received permission to publish its newspaper, Al-Ba'th. Comrade Michel 'Aflaq wrote the first editorial, entitled 'Seeds of the Ba'th', on July 3rd. 1946, which underlined the great significance of the new movement. In the 6th. issue, he wrote an article on foreign policy calling, for the first time, for close relations with the Soviet Union. The newspaper was a means of opposing arbitrary methods, intimidation and exploitation but was constantly threatened with suspension and legal sanctions.

At a members meeting on January 27th. 1947, to prepare for the foundation congress, the founder clarified the Party's position on a number of matters. One of the most important of these concerned the government, which was described as «representative of the feudal capitalist exploiters and having no idea of the people's sufferings», and the vain fight against rising prices «which does not change the basis of our socio-economic system. The problem of rising prices can only be solved by the application of socialist principles... by nationalizing the foreign companies and freeing the people from their exploitation of such basic needs as water, electricity and transport, and by distributing land to the small farmers». The congress held its meeting between April 4-6th. 1947 and in this one session was able to draft out the ideological, political and organisational Party poli-

cies. Its principles of unity, social justice and freedom, together with its revolutionary approach to politics soon became a powerful incentive and a magnet for attracting Arab youth and intellectuals.

Chapter Two

The Foundation and the Palestinian Disaster

(1947-1949)

On April 4th. 1947, about two hundred young Ba'thists who were able to do so, came from all over Syria to Damascus together with some students from Jordan, the Lebanon and Iraq, for the opening of the 1st. Congress of the Ba'th Party, in other words, its foundation Congress. The meeting lasted three days, during which reports previously prepared, were discussed, the constitution, the principles and internal organisation were approved. Late at night on April 6th., Michel 'Aflaq was unanimously elected Party president. An executive committee consisting of three members was also elected which, with the president, became the first officially recognised leadership of the Party.

Although no national leadership was elected by the congress, it at least exposed to the members «the capacities and potential latent in the Party. The seeds of a National Leadership of the future had been sown...» «The 1st. Congress of the Arab Ba'th Party was a historic event in member's lives, only the future will show

whether it will also be one in the history of contemporary Arab politics». (Al-Ba'th, April 15th. 1947).

The foundation congress charted the main course of Arab revolutionary ideology. It gave it its distinguishing features and separated it from the main trends of current thought —chauvinism, ultra-nationalism, national socialism, liberalism, reformation etc... Nevertheless, the constitution of this first Arab revolutionary movement seriously attempted to emphasise the complementary aspects of Arab revolutionary ideology.

From the organisational point of view, article 1. of the constitution's general principles laid out the structure of the Arab revolutionary movement and considered the Ba'th Party to be «a party for all Arabs who may establish branches in all the Arab countries. It is not concerned with the politics of any particular country except insofar as it affects the greater Arab interest».

The political manifesto drew up a list of those powers which were hostile to the Arab nation, those which had usurped part of its territory, pillaged its wealth and supported Zionism. It was from then on that the Party put the United States high on the list because of their meddling in Middle Eastern affairs, their support of British colonialism and their plundering of Arab natural resources. The manifesto called upon the Arab people to join together to fight these enemy countries. It asked Arab governments to review their diplomatic relations and that the Arab League should take urgent steps to unify the armed forces and the representation abroad of Arab countries, and that passport and customs regulations should be abolished between them.

The congress also called for a review of the treaties and concession arrangements with foreign countries and

companies and for a reversal of the divisionist policy being followed by the governments of Syria and the Lebanon. In its place, it proposed that they should work towards a union which would strengthen the independence of the two countries and be a step forward towards Arab unity as a whole.

The congress gave its approval of cooperation with progressive Arab parties fighting against colonialism from outside and exploitation inside in order to build a people's Arab national front.

On Monday morning, April 7th., the Party in its new form, began a fruitful period in its militant life.

During the celebrations marking the evacuation of foreign troops from Syria on April 17th. 1947, the founder, speaking for the Party, repeated: «The evacuation of Syria should not make us forget our duty towards other Arab countries».

The Party continued its struggle with the ruling classes both in Syria and in other countries. On April 23rd., it declared: «Our people are henceforth committed to action on a national scale; let the exploiters and the feudalists tremble».

In a manifesto of the same date, the Party started the battle for the revision of the electoral law to introduce direct suffrage. The movement was so effective that the government was forced to revise the law. Thus the Party won another victory for democracy, having already compelled the government to retreat over its police project. While this was going on, the Party, in May 1947, supported the Lebanese people in their opposition to the rigged elections in the expectation that the same class in Syria would resort to something similar.

On June 2nd., the president prepared a memoran-

dum requesting, for the third time, that the Party should have permission to carry out its public activities. It emphasised that the country needed a new style of politics. The election campaign took place during June and July and the Party competed in certain electoral districts. The most noteworthy campaigns were those of Michel 'Aflaq and Salah al-Bitar in Damascus and were proof of the spectacular rallying of the people to the Party. The president was already certain in advance of several thousand votes, but by shameless rigging, the authorities stuffed the ballot boxes to the extent that the total votes exceeded the number of the local population. During the campaign, Michel 'Aflaq defined the Party's policy on legislative elections. On June 20th. he stated: «While for some people it is an opportunity to make speeches and propaganda, we believe that there are things which are more important and worthwhile than propaganda for parties or individuals. For us, it is an opportunity to give people guidance and to carry on the national struggle».

While the fight for free elections was going on, the Party announced the candidature of some of its members who intended to stand as independents, declaring that «the people should not be tied to a list». It continued to attack the ruling classes and on June 26th. said that «the sectarianism of the National Party in power is the greatest danger which threatens the country».

On July 1st., the Party published an article in Al-Ba'th under the title: «The Arab Ba'th calls upon the Arab nation to fight against the ruling clique and to overthrow the government and its plots to prevent free elections». After publication, Salah al-Bitar was arrested and sentenced to six months imprisonment.

Hardly had the Party emerged from its fight for democracy when it once more took up the national Arab cause. In September 1947, a Party council was held, attended by delegates from the branches. The final communiqué stated that a number of questions had been discussed concerning Syrian and national matters, and especially the question of Palestine.

In the light of the deteriorating situation and the resolution on partition, the Party announced, on October 19th. 1947: «The decisive hour has struck; Palestine can only be rescued by steel and guns». It attacked the conduct of the negotiations, considering them to be a trick of the British, the Americans and Zionism: «They want to make the Arabs think that the Palestinian problem is a political one which can be resolved by negotiation and conferences. This, however, is only propaganda designed to influence the American and British people»... it went on: «Partition will deny the people's great ambition for Arab unity... it will not only strike at the heart of this unity, but will threaten the independence of every Arab country». (Al Ba'th, 21/12/47).

Having this clear point of view on the connection between Palestine, independence and unity, the Party called for the use of oil as a weapon in the battle: «Oil and the strategic geographical position of the Arab homeland are, together with military strength, sufficient to restore us our rights». (11/10/47). If only the Arabs «had threatened these countries, which only understand the language of self-interest, with the cutting off of oil supplies and gold, plus an economic boycott... partition would never have happened». (21/12/47).

At the beginning of 1948, the year of disaster, the

Party, «seeing no other way of rescuing Palestine except by war», decided at the meeting in Homs on January 15-16th. «to mobilise its members to take part in the war effort within the Arab countries, or in the front line in Palestine. It decided to despatch a battalion to the front under the command of the executive committee». Having arrived there, the Party gave a warning against the way in which the war was being conducted: «Skirmishes are useless when faced with unforeseen danger». It called upon all the Arab armies to come to Palestine and liberate it from Zionism (15/2/48).

The reactionary Syrian government took advantage of the Arab nation's concern over the events in Palestine and tried to change the constitution in order to renew the mandate of the President of the Republic. The Ba'thists, fighting the enemy in the front line, opposed this new attempt to establish a dictatorship, and stressed that «this proposal to change the constitution was a threat to the Republic, its independence and liberty». (8/3/48). This new fight for democracy was a fierce one. The government took arbitrary action against the Party. The newspaper was suspended three times, members of the Party were arrested, and some, workers in particular, were maltreated. A terrorist attack against the Party's office occurred on March 14th. 1948 when a bomb was thrown in while a meeting was taking place. The office was immediately surrounded by the police who arrested about 50 members.

The struggle in Syria did not prevent the others from continuing the armed fight in Palestine, and when the president returned at the end of the war, he published a statement, on September 7th. 1948, showing the connection between the Palestine disaster and the deterioration

of the internal situation. This angered the authorities who had him arrested and sent for trial. The court sentenced him to six months imprisonment, reduced to two months «because of Mr. 'Aflaq's record in the fight against the French during the time of the mandate». This trial and the arguments for the defense are documents of historical importance.

Only a few weeks after the trial, a series of strikes took place throughout Syria in protest against the government's home and foreign policy, the increase in prices, corruption and venality and illegal profit-making. The government fired on these demonstrations and a number of people including Ba'th militants were killed or wounded. The Party demanded the government's resignation and the trial of its leaders. In fact the government did resign and a cabinet of technocrats was set up. It was quickly attacked by the Party as being «a parody of a solution which still allowed the constitution to be violated and the people to be coerced, intimidated and misled».

The Party continued to attack the reactionary government in Syria and, in addition, withdrew from the Arab nationalist party conference, organised by the Lebanese Nationalist Appeal Party. The reason was the presence of members of the Syrian National Party, at the time in power in Syria. Comrade Michel 'Aflaq, in justification of this decision, defined his understanding of a nationalist party as follows: «The nationalist parties would be abandoning their responsibility for rescuing the Arab nation from the internal and external dangers which threaten its existence, if they do not decide to break with the social class and its political representatives who are the cause of the ever-growing dangers to

which the nation is exposed». (19/1/49). The Party also conducted a campaign to prevent government ratification of the Tapline agreement whereby the oil companies were given permission to usurp the Arab people's rights. It published tracts and organised demonstrations which led to the arrest of Midhet al-Bitar, the leader of the Damascus branch on March 4th. 1949, and his imprisonment in Ommeyade prison. The Party also denounced the iniquitous financial agreement with France and all the activities of Syrian reactionaries. By doing this, it helped to isolate and discredit the government in the eyes of the people, whereas for several years it had been their beacon and symbol of the national independence movement.

This left the field open for the overthrow of the government, which took place on March 30th. 1949, by the army. This was the beginning of an era of military coups d'état in Syria which continued during the following years.

Chapter Three

The Syrian Military Coups d'Etat

(1949-1954)

The first coup d'état, March 30th. 1949

The Party gave conditional support to the coup d'état of Husni Za'im. It gave it because he had defeated the reactionary government, but drew attention to the underlying reasons and to the need to learn from them for the new period about to begin (Party Memorandum to Husni Za'im, April 4th. 1949). The founder, in his address to the Party rally organised to celebrate the fall of the reactionary regime, said: «What has taken place is not an overturning but only the first step towards it. The Arab people are looking for a complete overturning of society». (7/4/1949).

The Party sent a series of more and more critical memoranda to the new government on a number of questions, amongst which were the Tapline agreement, the financial agreement and the ban on the civil service against joining a political party. On May 24th., it stated in a memorandum that: «The army's power does not

depend upon its weapons, but upon the way in which it responds to the aspirations and needs of the people».

During this time, and before the violent confrontation with the dictatorial regime which followed the memorandum of May 24th., the first session of the new Party's assembly had been held in April, and to which members had been elected by the provincial branches in Syria and Transjordan. Michel 'Aflaq was unanimously re-elected President and six members instead of three as previously, were elected to the Executive Committee.

Following the May 24th. memorandum, Michel 'Aflaq and a large number of Ba'thists were arrested, but nevertheless the Party continued the fight with the regime. On May 30th., it published a manifesto in which it declared that any agreement ratified during this period would be illegal in the absence of the elected representatives of the people, and that it would oppose any constitution which had not been drawn up by an elected constitutional assembly. The Party demanded a free government and opposed the pseudo-referendum for a constitution which had been organised by Husni Za'im.

On June 9th., the party renewed its demands in another communiqué. The result was a widespread denunciation of the dictatorial regime and a few months afterwards, on August 14th. 1949, it was overthrown by a group of officers who killed Husni Za'im and the Prime Minister, Muhsin Barazi.

The Hannawi Coup d'Etat

The Hannawi coup d'état restored liberal parliamentary democracy to Syria. A transitional government was formed under the presidency of Hashim al-Atasi and

included all those parties which had been in opposition before the Husni Za'im coup d'état. The Party was represented by its president who was given the Ministry of Education. The Cabinet was instructed to prepare a general election for the end of November 1949 to elect a constitutional Assembly which would draw up a permanent constitution for the country.

On September 15th., the Al-Ba'th newspaper reappeared and on the 22nd. the Party's offices re-opened. The Party put up a number of candidates for the elections. Jalal as-Sayyid, one of the leaders at the time, was elected, as was Abd-al-Aziz Harwill who joined the Party shortly afterwards. In the Damascus district, the president obtained more votes than his competitors, but the large number of candidates prevented him from winning an absolute majority. He ought to have campaigned for the second ballot but refused to do so inspite of popular pressure and the requests of many delegations.

The coup d'état gave the People's Party, which supported the monarchy in Iraq, the opportunity to seize the reins of power and create a climate in the country favourable to a union with Iraq, which would have been a threat to the republic and to the national and democratic gains in Syria. The national movements, whose influence with the people was strong, opposed this move and provided Adib Shishakli with the opportunity to carry out his first army coup. He took over command of the army and put pressure on the political institutions.

Before this, during the first week of December, the Syrian branch of the Party held its regional congress during which it defined its policies for the coming period. On December 29th., in a speech at the Universi-

ty, Michel 'Aflaq gave a warning to be on guard against those who were supporting imperialist interests, dressing them up in patriotic clothing and giving them a nationalist appearance. He castigated the feuds which were rife amongst the professional cliques which had sold their souls to the foreigner. «There are some who want to serve the imperialist interests by calling for unity, for the republic and for liberty. There are Arab monarchies which support the Syrian republic and others which, while claiming to be the standard bearers of unity, surrender themselves to the foreigner».

In this speech the Party president not only castigated those who whished to lead Syria according to imperialism's plans, but also those who, in trying to block these moves, were directing the country towards other Arab connections. The founder was more specific on the following January 4th. when he advised the militants «to keep their ranks closed during the fight and to beware those adventurers whom the fight entrances when it is easy and full of enthusiasm, and who, when they have become more well known and influential, consider that by avoiding the demands and the hard logic of the struggle, they can the more easily gain personal success. This propels them with disconcerting speed towards treason and conspiracy because for them there is no middle way».

On January 9th. 1950, the Party set out its viewpoint on the People's Party proposal for union with Iraq. It emphasised «the necessity that the union should be between two republics as one of the basic criteria for the liberation of the Arab nation». It stated that «a union between Iraq and Syria would be the first step in the direction of Arab union, but that its success would be

determined by two essential conditions; the first of these was that the people should be certain that union would not subject them politically, economically or militarily to a foreign power». The Party therefore «required the revision of the Iraqi-British agreement in order that Iraq become independent». The second condition was that «on the progressive front, the people should be certain that union would not mean that they could be exploited by and subjected to the rule of the reactionary feudal classes. For this reason it laid down the condition that the progressive socialist government in Syria should go on».

In this way, the Party clarified its wiewpoint that liberation and progressiveness were part of its social democratic concept of nationalism. At the same time it took care to ensure that these conditions should not obstruct the road to union but rather that they should contribute to its success.

The first meeting of the Party Assembly for the year took place between April 6th. and April 9th. 1950. A short communiqué was issued which reaffirmed «The struggle against colonialism, feudalism and capitalism». An internal bulletin was published giving an outline of the political and organisational discussions. The Party opposed the economic rupture with the Lebanon and the return of Quwatli to Syria. The perfomance of its representative Jalal Sayyid was considered to be tarnished with «spontaneous improvisation» in the discussion, and various financial questions and suggestions for covering expenses were also discussed.

It expressed its opinion on the constitutional project, then in discussion in the Assembly. It demanded that a limit be set on land ownership and that the farmworker

be freed from the oppression of feudalism; likewise, that industrial ownership also be limited and the dignity of the workers protected.

At the end of 1950, the Party supported the tobacco growers in their struggle against the foreign tobacco monopoly. It demanded its nationalization and organised student and other demonstrations in its support. On December 29th. the authorities replied by firing on them and the Party laid the blame on the government.

Preoccupation with internal Syrian problems did not prevent it from publishing a communiqué on November 29th. 1950, the anniversary of partition, on the Palestine problem in which it demonstrated the link between its liberation and the fall of the reactionary feudal regime. Previously, on October 20th., it had shown its solidarity with the Egyptian people in their fight for the evacuation of foreign troops.

It held the second meeting of the Assembly during the last days of 1950 and took decisions on Syrian political and economic questions and also on pan-Arab and international matters, (approval of neutrality as a policy and the fight against imperialism).

At the beginning of 1951, it confirmed the importance of neutrality when the Western imperialist block was making attempts to draw the Arab League to its side. The Party strongly attacked these moves and repeated that «by being neutral and independent in the defence of our country, we can keep the peace in the Arab east».

In February, the Labour Offices set up by the Party held meetings to examine the working conditions of the workers and peasants. The objective was to agitate for a change in the legislation so that the workers would be protected, and for new legislation which would do the

same for the peasants. They emphasised the need to form a trade union for these two classes.

In its reply to the invitation of the Indian Socialist Party to attend the Asian Socialist Conference, the Party outlined its view of the relationships between socialist parties. It stated that it was the anti-imperialist parties which should be invited and gave a warning against «the European socialist parties which behave as if they were the heirs of colonialism». The letter proposed the formation of a ‘third camp’, that of peace and socialism, and described the link between, on the one hand, war, poverty and lower living standards, and on the other, between peace, freedom and national unity.

During the same month, the Party raised the question of the water and food crisis in the Arab Jebel, as well as that of the textile workers who had been dismissed in Aleppo with whom it joined in a month long struggle. May 1st. provided the occasion to bring up the questions of unemployment and trade union organisation.

The Party Assembly held its first meeting in July, reviewing all the subjects on the agenda and drawing up the framework for a genuine people’s government based upon «work, freedom and unity». It put forward the idea of a people’s army to defend the country and fight against imperialism’s plots. It stressed the need for an economic union with the Lebanon, analysed the situation in each Arab country and renewed its appeal for a people’s Arab League. Finally, it repeated that there could be no solution to the Palestine question except under a free and firmly based people’s government.

In August, the Party brought up the question of the Syrian landworkers conditions and demanded legislation which would limit land ownership, would rationalise the

planning of agricultural income, would distribute land owned by the State to farmers, would guarantee agricultural loans, control irrigation and institute educational, medical and social services.

In September, on behalf of the growers, the Party raised again the problem of the Tobacco administration. In the previous year, it had succeeded in having it nationalized but this time the fight was against its internal corruption.

In October, the Syrian Party undertook a widespread campaign, and called for volunteers, to support the Egyptian fight for evacuation and the rejection of a proposal for a quadripartite defence pact. On October 28th. it gave Egypt strong support in its opposition to the evacuation treaty which would have the effect of isolating her, and pointed out the danger of this when one considered the importance of Egypt in the Arab world.

The Egyptian affair provided the Party with the opportunity to come out into the open in those countries where it was still in the initial stages, and in the Lebanon, the Ba'thists published a manifesto under the name of the «Nationalist Arab Youth».

On the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, November 2nd. 1951, the Party's communiqué pointed out the connection between the salvation of Palestine, the support of the Egyptian uprising and the liberation of the Arab homeland; and on November 6th. called upon the Ba'thist youth of the Nile Valley (a group of Arab students in Egyptian universities and including some Egyptians), to join the freedom battalions.

Shishakli's Dictatorship 1951-1954

At the end of November, 1951, the Party was invited to join the People's Party government of Maruf Duwalibi, even though it had only two parliamentary seats. The Ba'th refused, however because of the conditions stipulated and as a result the government found itself cut off from popular support even though it had a parliamentary majority.

This situation enabled Adib Shishakli to carry out his coup d'état on the day following the formation of Duwalibi's government. He ordered the dissolution of the constitutional Assembly, transformed it into a National Assembly, dismissed the ministers and took over direct control.

Shishakli was in a good position as far as the Party's aims and requirements were concerned, but nevertheless, it informed him, on December 8th., that it would define its attitude to the coup d'état in the light of the new government's actions vis-à-vis the people's freedom, the return to constitutional government at the earliest opportunity and the rejection of foreign commitments. It also said «that the Party could not turn its back on a constitutionally elected government. But at the same time, and as a revolutionary socialist party, it would not allow itself to become ensnared in parliamentary assemblies which were only the instruments of the exploiters, the feudal cliques and the professional politicians».

During this period, the Party expressed its views on «the parliamentary experiment and military coups d'état». It commented on the fact that Syria, during the

last few years, had alternated between military and parliamentary dictatorship, and stressed the point that a nominal democratic parliamentary regime was in fact a feudal one. It showed that there was a connection between parliamentary elections and the laws which protected the people from exploitation and terrorisation. In reply to those who used the argument that a military dictatorship was justified because of the corruption which existed, the Party stated in its newspaper, on December 29th. 1951, «it is the struggle of the people which is the real force in the country... the fact that there is a travesty of democracy does not discredit democracy itself, but only the baseness of the class which creates the travesty in order to satisfy its greed and selfish interest».

Despite the seriousness of the situation which was developing in Syria and in which the Party was involved, it continued to note developments in the Arab countries, particularly in Egypt. In a message published on December 22nd., seven months before the revolution, it called upon the Egyptian people «to rise against the power of the king and the pashas», and was enthusiastic about the rapid growth of the people's movement. On January 19th. 1952, it wrote: «Egypt today is showing us the road to success in the struggle that is the invincible struggle of the people», and organised student demonstrations in support. The Shishakli government opposed this and the Party newspaper riposted with a strong attack in an article on January 26th. —«The continuance of any government is determined by its fidelity to the freedom of the people, to its Arabism and to Socialism». Shishakli immediately closed down the newspaper and prosecuted the Ba'thists.

In a manifesto published in the same issue, the Party

reiterated the anti-imperialist element in its concept of neutrality and demanded that a number of interim measures be taken in order to move towards the main goals of freedom, unity and socialism. The most notable of these were the denunciation of foreign treaties, the departure of foreign troops, the nationalization of oil, the nationalization of the exploiting companies and of the public services, and the announcement of a genuine neutrality.

The Party, at the same time, drew up a programme for the Arab revolutionary movement to follow up as far as the main stage of national democratic freedom in the political, economic and military fields. This programme became the guide for many of the national freedom movements throughout the entire Arab homeland.

Party activity against Shishakli's dictatorship increased and it began to reinforce its links with its allies, especially with the Arab Socialist Party. Its leader was Akram Hurani and its main supporters were in the towns and countryside behind Hama. This party had similar objectives to those of the Ba'th, and its constitution, published in 1950 was also very similar. The merger took place in Damascus on November 13th. 1953 on the basis of the Ba'th constitution, and the word 'socialist' was added to the name of the Party. In fact, this signified nothing new because its socialism had been evident from the very beginning.

The merger had some unfortunate consequences in that the election campaign mentality and rather traditional methods began to spread in some Party circles. Nevertheless there were also positive benefits in the strengthening of the Party's fight against the dictatorship, which stepped up its repressive measures to the

point that the most important leaders left the country for the Lebanon on January 1st. 1953. They remained there for several months until the Shimun government expelled them at Shishakli's request. They then spent four months in Italy, afterwards returning to Syria to continue the fight. A few weeks after their return they were arrested, on January 2nd. 1954, and remained in prison until the fall of the regime on February 24th. of the following year.

The Emergence of the Party on the Arab Scene

1952 was an important year for the Party, for it was then that the working people in a number of countries became aware of its organisation.

In Iraq, the Party's philosophy was well known in student, intellectual, educational and legal circles as a result of brochures such as 'Observations of the Arab Ba'th' and 'Arab Politics' or through the influence of Arab Syrians attending Baghdad University and Iraqi students at Damascus University. In the same year, the Independence Party and the National Democratic Party went into opposition to the government because of its aversion to the traditional parties. The Ba'th Party showed its strength by distributing tracts, organising strikes and demonstrations, especially during the uprising of November 1952. This attracted the authorities attention and from then on they kept a watch on the militants and tried to infiltrate into the organisation.

The Party also came out into the open in the Lebanon at a large public meeting at Sidon, in the south of the country, held to commemorate the memory of the

Syrian and Lebanese patriots executed on May 6th. by Jamal Pasha during the First World War. Ten days later the administrative sections' congress took place during which organisational matters, the groundwork for future action and the Syrian political situation were discussed.

In the Lebanon, on March 6th. 1951, the Party had issued an appeal for aid to the Moroccan people in their fight against colonial cruelty, emphasising that all Arabs should unite to fight colonialism in every country. On October 18th. 1951, the imperialist plans for joint defence were attacked in a communiqué, and on October 22nd. a demonstration of support for the struggle in the Nile Valley was organised.

In Jordan, the Party had started its activities in 1948 by publishing the newspaper Al-Yaqza. In the following year, a number of Palestinians joined such as Rimawi and Na'was, and this provided a wide field for action, part of which was the decision to take part in the elections. By 1950 it had two representatives, Na'was in Jerusalem and Rimawi in Ramallah.

In 1952 the Party held its first regional congress. It gave guidance to the people's movement by demanding that the country should be freed from the military and economic shackles of British imperialism and that the people should regain their freedom of action. It also opposed the ruler's moves to seek an armistice with Israel and to settle the refugees on a permanent basis. Large popular demonstrations were organised after each Israeli frontier aggression and the government attacked for its refusal to react.

In Syria, the Party in 1953 entered the final phase of its struggle with the Shishakli dictatorship. It formed a

united front with all the other Syrian parties with the exception of the communists and nationalists in order to bring down the dictatorship. At a large political meeting at Homs in the summer of 1953, the front called for a boycott of the elections. Other methods were also used, beginning with the distribution of tracts and organising of demonstrations, and ending by the planting of explosives in various parts of the towns in order to embarrass and weaken the regime. It took part in the Arab Jebel uprising at the beginning of 1954, losing more than a hundred of its fighting men, and this opened the way for the spread of Party membership amongst the officers, starting in Aleppo, and in the end spreading to every section of the armed forces. As a result, Shishakli was forced to leave the country to take refuge in the Lebanon and subsequently in Brazil where ten years later he was killed by a young man from the Arab Jebel.

In other countries the Party also joined in the struggle to overthrow Shishakli.

Party activity in Iraq began to take on wider popular dimensions in 1953, especially after the internal upheaval in the Iraqi Communist Party, forcing it to disappear from the scene. It published its first underground newspaper Al-Arabi al-Jadid (The New Arab), which after its third edition changed its name to Al-Ishtiraki (The Socialist). Tracts were distributed supporting the Moroccan people and the Party also took up the cause of the Tobacco Company workers in October 1953. On December 14th. it succeeded in calling a strike of the school and University students as a demonstration of solidarity with the Basra Petroleum Company's workers, which was a serious setback for the Jamali government. The Party's reputation reached its peak in November

when it organised a demonstration against the Shishakli dictatorship.

In the Lebanon, the Party effectively demonstrated its solidarity with the Syrian people by distributing tracts and organising demonstrations and because of the close ties between the two countries. During the same year the Party expressed its opposition to the visit of Dulles to the region.

The severity of the struggle against Shishakli did not prevent the Party from holding a 'national' meeting at Homs in the summer of 1953. Representatives of all Syrian branches and offices together with delegates from the Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq were present. It was decided to convene a large 'national' congress to work out details for a pan-Arab organisation and to set a new starting point. An internal bulletin on this, entitled «A Party national congress» was issued in July 1953.

Chapter Four

The Battle over the Baghdad Pact

The end of Shishakli's dictatorship at the beginning of 1954 gave the Party complete freedom of movement to continue the struggle against reactionary movements and the plans of imperialism. This year witnessed, primarily, the all-out struggle against the Baghdad pact, the outlines of which were becoming more clear after the visits of Turkish leaders to the city.

In Iraq itself, the Party had only limited possibilities for opposing the new imperialist project. It realised that it would be difficult to block the pact with its own resources, but that at least, it should start a movement for its rejection and arouse public opinion against it. The opportunity occurred with the visit of the Turkish Prime Minister, Menderes. Banners were put up in the streets and Faculties and students called upon to strike. The authorities arrested a number of militants and forced the others to go underground to continue the struggle.

In Jordan, the patriots, with the Party in the vanguard, protested against the country's membership of

the pact. The ruler decided to dissolve the national Assembly. A new government under Abu-l-Hady was formed and falsified the election results in order to have a puppet parliament —denounced by all the Jordanian patriotic movements. The fight against membership of the pact continued throughout 1955. It was stepped up on the visit of Galal, the Turkish President at the beginning of November and succeeded in preventing a final commitment being made.

In the Lebanon in March 1954, the Ba'thists organised or took part in student demonstrations. The Lebanese authorities opposed them by force and there was one dead and several wounded. The American University, at whose entrance the bloody clashes had taken place, decided to dissolve the student assembly and dismissed a large number of students, including the Ba'thists.

In Syria, the Party played an important part in denouncing the pact, especially in its newspaper Al-Ba'th which had reappeared on April 8th. 1954, and succeeded in preventing the country from joining. During the election campaign in the spring and summer of that year, the Party succeeded in forcing the resignation of the government formed by the alliance of the People's Party with the National Party, in order that a non-party government should be responsible for organising the elections. These took place on September 24th. and the Party won sixteen seats spread over most of the governorates.

The newspaper also started a campaign strongly criticising the Egyptian government's policy at that time. As a principle, the Party held certain reserves as far as military regimes were concerned and it was because the contradictory statements by Egyptian leaders on pan-

Arab policies showed that they lacked a clear idea of what these ought to be. It also criticised the evacuation treaty with Great Britain, which the Party saw as a backward step from total unconditional evacuation.

As far as internal matters were concerned, the Party held its second national congress during the June of that year. The first internal rules were approved and the first national Directorate elected consisting of three members from Syria, two from Jordan and one each from Iraq and the Lebanon. Following on this, The Lebanon and Iraq each held their first regional congresses, —an indication that a new phase had been reached in national and local organisation.

The Party's Syrian regional assembly took place on January 6th. 1955. Representatives from all the branch offices together with the Syrian members of the national Directorate, in particular the Party's General Secretary comrade Michel 'Aflaq, were present. At the meeting, a five member executive committee was formed consisting of three members elected by the Assembly and two nominated by the national Directorate, with the responsibility for implementing the internal regulations.

A large proportion of the Syrian Ba'th's activities in that year was taken up with local problems and the rôle of the Party's Parliamentary members. In the Budget debates on January 22nd., the Party stressed that «a capitalist economy in developing countries cannot be a national economy». On the same day, the Ba'thist members put forward amendments to the Labour legislation to help the working class and to give protection to the landworkers and their right to have a trade union. On June 4th. they put forward a proposal for the nationalization of foreign oil companies in the country,

after having presented a detailed study of their operations.

All this did not prevent the Party from giving special attention to the anti-pact struggle. In February 1955, it attacked Iraq's foreign policy. It agreed to join the coalition government with the aim of working out an independent Arab policy for Syria, especially after Nuri Sa'id had signed the pact with Turkey. It reiterated, however, that «the present government is not the ideal one but it is the one which we should accept since it is the outcome of parliamentary party agreements».

The Party put up strong resistance to the attempts to refute Syria's Arab nationalist policy. These attempts by the groups supporting the imperialist pacts became more aggressive, and ended with the assassination of Aduan al-Maliki, the Syrian Deputy Chief of Staff. The objective was to weaken the nationalists' influence in the army.

In August 1955, the Party once again opposed the election of Shukri al-Quwatli as President of the Republic even though the two majority parties, the People's Party and the National Party, supported his candidature. During the period of Sa'id al-Ghazzi's government, formed after these elections, the Party remained in the opposition.

It put up strenuous objections to the Franco-Tunisian agreement which destroyed the people's rights and gave its support to Salih ben Yusif, the Tunisian leader of the opposition at the time.

In Iraq, the people's opposition to the pacts and to Nuri Sa'id's government increased, and the tracts and demonstrations became more frequent. Suddenly, in June 1955, the reactionary government launched a widespread campaign of repression against the Party

militants, during which they discovered the hiding place of the only roneo machine used for printing the newspaper and the tracts, and seized it. Twenty two militants were arrested and a large number forced to go into hiding. This reduced Party activities for several months, but these were subsequently restarted with even greater energy.

In the Lebanon, the Party initiated a widespread campaign against the pacts. On January 14th. 1955, it published a communiqué in the name of «The Free Arab Nationalists», and called for a demonstration against the visit to the Lebanon of the Turkish President, Galal Bayar. It also strengthened its internal organisation as a result of practical experience, and defined the course of action to be followed by the progressive Arab movements in the country.

In Jordan, the national movements continued to fight against the Baghdad pact membership and the puppet parliament. As a result of violent clashes with the police in which 80 people were killed, the king had to dismiss the government, dissolve parliament and set new elections for September 1956. Rimawi and Kamal Nasir were elected in Ramallah, and Abdulla Na'was for Jerusalem, apart from a large number of patriotic party candidates. In the same year, the Party organised active demonstrations at the time of the visit of the British general Templer, and demanded the dismissal of Glubb Pasha, the British Commander in Chief of the Jordanian army.

In 1955 also, the Party came into being in South Yemen and joined the workers Congress and the Trade Unions in Aden.

Chapter Five

On the road to Unity

(1956-1958)

1956 was a positive year in our nation's contemporary history not only in the anti-imperialist struggle of the nationalization of the Suez Canal and the Anglo-French-Sionist attack on Egypt, but also in the struggle for unity, for which in Syria, the Party played an important part in promoting the union with Egypt.

The Egyptian breaking of the arms embargo by turning to the socialist camp, and its hostile attitude to the Baghdad pact were clear evidence of the liberating and anti-imperialist character of the July revolution. From that point onwards, the Party's attitude to the revolution continued to improve and consideration was given to the idea of creating an Arab national front to oppose all pacts which were aimed at yoking the region, politically and militarily, to the imperialist sphere of interest.

On April 17th. 1956, the anniversary of the evacuation of Syria, the General Secretary issued a communiqué into which the slogan for union between Egypt and

Syria was introduced. He called upon the militants to prepare the people for it and to put pressure on the government and the parliament for its adoption. The Party explained that at this stage, imperialist policy was primarily concerned with isolating Egypt, also the Maghreb from the Masreq, by providing Israel with arms so that she could continue with her aggression against the Arab nation, and in putting up proposals for pseudo-union with the objective of separating the Arabs from Egypt. The main objective of this policy was the protection of the oilfields and their communications, the safeguarding of their markets, and the establishment of strategic bases.

In Syria, the governments situation was unstable. The composition of the national Assembly had not changed, and therefore did not reflect the major change in popular opinion towards the Party. The government, of which the Party was not a member, still had the confidence of the Assembly, but no longer that of the population. The majority of parties were agreed, for this reason, on the need to set up a coalition government in order that there should be continuity in Syria's policies. The Party declared that the basis for this coalition should be a National Charter which would satisfy everyone. On March 26th. 1956, it put forward a project for a charter, part of which was a programme for a serious confrontation with imperialism and Zionism as being an important step forward towards the liberation and unity of the Arab countries. One of its most important points was the proclamation of the union of Syria and Egypt as the nucleus of total Arab unity and a realistic move in this direction. In Syrian affairs, the Charter set out a clear defence policy, «which considered

the whole population, both men and women, civilians and military, in the front or in the rear, as being in the service of national defence».

As was usual, the traditional parties opposed the project, and in remaining firm, the Party precipitated a cabinet crisis. The government resigned, and Lutfi al-Haffar, the symbol of conventional politics, was asked to form a government. The Party's attitude foiled this manoeuvre and the traditionalists were compelled to invite it on its own conditions. In June, it held two key posts in the new cabinet, the Ministries for Foreign and Economic Affairs.

Although some of the traditionalists were opposed to the inclusion in its policy declaration of a clear reference to the Union project, the Party held its ground and refused to bargain. Its viewpoint was finally accepted and the project submitted to the national Assembly, which unanimously approved it on July 6th. The government was thereupon instructed to take the necessary steps for its implementation.

The Party's struggle for union went hand in hand with its efforts to forge an effective solidarity with the Algerian people in their uprising against French colonialism. It nominated May 8th. as Algeria Day, the anniversary of the French 1945 massacres. It organised demonstrations and strikes and demanded that the Arab governments should support the Algerian revolution and boycott France. On June 1st. it strongly attacked the Syrian government itself when it discovered that the Ministry of the Economy was exporting cereals to France. This attack, and its repercussions amongst the people, was one of the reasons for the fall of the government, leaving the way clear for a national coalition.

In Jordan, the early part of 1956 saw an increase in the people's resentment against the attitude in favour of the Baghdad pact. As a result, Samir Rifai's government fell and in March, Glubb Pasha was dismissed. The way was clear for the formation of a national coalition government, presided over by Sulayman Nablusi, in which the Party was represented by Rimawi who held the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

In Iraq, the Party spent the first half of the year in strengthening its organisation. At the same time, it continued its struggle against the reactionary regime. On February 24th., the anniversary of the signing of the Baghdad pact by Nuri Sa'id, it published tracts and organised demonstrations of solidarity with the Jordanian people's uprising, and on March 11th., celebrated the dismissal of Glubb Pasha as a step towards complete freedom from British influence. On March 23rd. there was a demonstration of solidarity with the Maghreb, particularly with Algeria, and on May 1st. it pointed out the connection between the exploitation of the working class and colonial exploitation with its subjugation of entire nations. In so doing, it explained the main link between the national struggle and the class struggle in the Arab revolution.

In the Lebanon also, the Party organised popular demonstrations, on January 12th., in support of the Jordanian people, and at the beginning of April, with the Algerian people. On May 1st., it called for the unity of the Arab working class and its trade unions.

It was at about this time that the Party message began to spread amongst the Egyptian youth, especially in the Universities of Cairo and Alexandria. Similarly it began to spread also in certain parts of the Gulf, in

Bahrein and the eastern side of the Arabian Peninsula.

This extension of the movement was a necessity before the Arab nation's battle started on Egyptian soil for the nationalization of the Canal and the resistance to the tripartite aggression. The close relationship which the Ba'th had with the Arab peoples had an enormous effect in making Egypt the battlefield of the Arab nation and in planting the roots of the struggle for unity into solid ground.

At the end of June 1956, three weeks before the Canal nationalization, Jamal Abd-an-Nasser was elected President of the Egyptian Republic, and approval was given to the constitution, which stated clearly that Egypt was an indivisible part of the Arab nation. The Party Directorate sent a telegram of congratulation and support for his actions: «Continue with what you have begun, to lead Egypt towards social justice, towards true democracy, towards effective support of the Arab struggle wherever it may be, and towards the implementation of the union between Egypt and Syria».

After the nationalization of the Canal, celebrated by the Ba'th and the Arab people, the broad outlines of the imperialist plot against Egypt began to become clear. The British Prime Minister, Eden, convened a conference in London on August 16th. to discuss the nationalization. The Party in Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon made it into a day of support for Egypt. The strikes and demonstrations could have left Eden in no doubt as to the militant solidarity of the Arabs with Egypt.

In a powerful article, the Party founder stated on August 23rd., two months before the aggression took place, that a direct confrontation with imperialism was inevitable; furthermore, that the Arabs should make the

necessary preparations by embarking on a revolutionary course which would answer the demands of the people. Michel 'Aflaq reiterated that it was possible for the Arabs, if they took as their base the Algerian revolution and recently liberated Egypt, to work out the course of the struggle and to join it in full confidence and assurance.

In September, in Damascus, a large public meeting was held to support the Canal nationalization and to hold this up as an example of Arab unity from the people's point of view. And from the moment that the aggression began, the Ba'th militants brought out the people in demonstrations of solidarity with Egypt. In Syria, the militants blew up the pipelines, using the oil weapon for the first time against the enemy. Training camps were opened for volunteers from all the Arab countries, who came especially from the Lebanon and Jordan. The government ordered a general mobilisation to defend the country, and broke off diplomatic relations with the aggressor countries.

In Baghdad, Nuri Sa'id's government put on the semblance of participation while scoffing at the Egyptian leaders. The Party and others of the national Front organised violent demonstrations all over the country, on which the authorities fired, causing scores of deaths and hundreds of wounded.

Foreseeing the dangers ahead, the Iraqi Party, after its third regional assembly, called for a renewal, in the 5th. issue of its newspaper 'The Socialist' (July/August 1956) of the National Union Front, a call which it repeated in November. It also opposed the statement by Nuri Sa'id in London en October 14th. in which he called for a final settlement of the Palestine problem by

pushing the Israelis to enter into negotiations with the Arabs. On October 28th. the Party again called a general strike in solidarity with the Algerian revolution.

In Jordan, the Party's participation in the government was an important factor in maintaining the country's non-alignment with the imperialist camp, and, up to a point, in line with Arab aspirations. The Ba'thist Minister for Foreign Affairs played an important role at the meeting in Beirut of the kings and presidents, held to decide upon a unified Arab posture vis-à-vis the aggression.

In the Lebanon, after Shimun had clearly shown his complicity with imperialism by his refusal to break off diplomatic relations with France and Great Britain, the Party helped to mobilise the people against the government and demanded its resignation as a protest against Camille Shimun's attitude. It joined in the forming of the national opposition which, in 1958, rose up against the Shimun regime.

The failure of the Franco-British attack on Egypt tolled the knell of old-style imperialism. From then on the new leader was America in the place of England and France. The Party, (in Al-Ba'th, March 1957) revealed the broad outline of American imperialism's new plan, part of which had been exposed by President Eisenhower in his address to Congress at the beginning of 1957. He defined his principles, known as the Eisenhower Doctrine, for «exploiting the breach in the Middle East». The Party said that the plan envisaged the destruction of the Arab nationalist movement which was developing into a historically powerful force. This would be achieved by dividing the people's struggle in the Maghreb from that in the Mashreq by overthrowing and dispersing freedom

movements, by setting up American bases, and, for good measure, by stirring up fears of communism. These imperialist projects became realities by their making the Saudi regime their headquarters, by the way in which they won over the Lebanon to the Eisenhower project, by the stirring up of dissension among the allied movements in Jordan and by encouraging the conspiracy against Syria.

The Party's forecasts proved to be accurate. After a short time, in the spring of 1957, king Hussein of Jordan turned against the national movements, dismissed the cabinet, purged the army of patriotic elements and started a big campaign of arrests and prosecutions against the national movements and against the Party in first place.

In the Lebanon, Shimun tried to attack the national movement and extend the State of Emergency, imposed on the pretext of the aggression against Egypt, in order to restrict the activities of the national militants. He falsified the legislative elections to keep the opposition out of parliament. He repressed the people's angry demonstrations which the Party had played an important part in organising in Beirut and other towns. It was in the same year, in October 1957, that the Party published its underground newspaper, *The New Arab*, and noticeably widened its popular base.

America succeeded in leading king Saud into the fold, after which some minor disputes within the Hashemite family caused him to go along with the current of liberation and to get involved with charters and declarations as Egypt and Syria had done.

In Syria, plots and attempts to stir up internal trouble followed one after the other and the economic

blockade increased. But the nationalist freedom movement led by our Party, dealt with them firmly. It was determined to carry on the struggle against imperialism, for union with Egypt and alliances with socialist countries. Imperialism then encouraged the Turkish government, which was in its pay, to mass troops on the Syrian frontier in preparation for a major attack. The Party and nationalist movements set about creating a people's defence force capable of resisting an attack, and speeded up the measures for union with Egypt.

Between July 9th. and 12th. 1957, the Party held a regional congress to go into organisational problems in the light of its previous experience. A Regional Directorate of nine members was elected with Dr. Midhet al-Bitar as Syrian Regional Secretary. The Party now had a powerful influence with the population, and this became evident during the partial elections which took place that year to replace those members who had been sentenced for their participation in the imperialist plot against the country. The Party won two seats, one in Damascus and one in the Arab Jebel, bringing the total to eighteen.

In Iraq, the Party continued the struggle against the most shamelessly reactionary of all Arab governments and the one most involved in imperialism's plans. It also continued the people's struggle which had started after the tripartite attack on Egypt. When the authorities re-opened the faculties and schools at the end of January 1957 on the assumption that calm had returned to Iraq, student demonstrations, joined by wide sections of the population, began, using the slogan: «No peace or stability for Sa'id's government, nor for the hateful Baghdad pact while free men remain in prison». The

commemoration of the forty victims during the demonstrations at Najaf was yet another occasion for a new fight with the men in power. There were several clashes at Mosul, Hilla and elsewhere. Hundreds of students in Baghdad were arrested and the prisons and camps were filled with the free men of Iraq, (Al-Ishtiraki No. 8, February 1957).

The Party mobilised the Iraqi people on a wide scale against the Eisenhower Doctrine and demanded a clear definition of the responsibilities of the High Committee of the National Union Front which had been formed as an opposition alliance. Apart from the Ba'th, it consisted of the Independence Party (Istiqlal), the National Party, the Democratic Party, and the Communist Party. When Nuri Sa'id's government fell in August 1957, the Party resolutely opposed the Ayyubi government, which only lasted four months and was succeeded on December 22nd, by that of Abd-al-Wahhab who only confirmed the Party's view of the pro-imperialist policy.

In Iraq the Party was effective in galvanising the people to join the struggle. It proved this capability at a time when the Communist Party was torn by internal strife. The fourth regional assembly was held at that time, November 1957, and devoted a large proportion of its discussions to the condition of the National Union Front and the role of the Party within it.

On the national scene, the Party had been expanding in Egypt. Its General Secretary Michel 'Aflaq spent long periods there with young people, with intellectuals and with militants. It was his opportunity to explain and disseminate the Party's thinking in this large Arab country.

Chapter Six

Union and Separation

(1958-1963)

It was evident that 1957 opened the road to one of the most important victories in contemporary Arab history, namely, the union of Egypt and Syria which took place on February 22nd. 1958, and for which the Party paid a high price. This price was the dissolution of its organisation in the two countries. Although the Syrian regional congress unanimously supported this, the young Party in Egypt gave a warning against the seriousness of this decision in the light of their direct experience of the regime.

The victory over union gave a new impetus to the wave of nationalism and revolution in the region during that year. The Algerian revolution, then in its third year, received a powerful stimulus. The national struggle in Iraq found new energy at all levels and led to the revolutionary explosion of July 14th. against the main stronghold of imperialism and reaction in the region. When the regime fell so did the Baghdad pact, dragging with it the plans and dreams of old-style imperialism. The

Ba'th took part in the revolution and in the first government which followed.

In the Lebanon, the birth of the United Arab Republic met an immense response from the people. Young Ba'thists led tens of thousands in demonstrations in all the towns. Thousands of them went to Damascus to join in the celebrations. The ditch separating the Lebanese Arabs, seeking freedom, and the isolationist government in the pay of imperialism became deeper and culminated in the insurrection which broke out in May 1958. It lasted for five months and ended in the downfall of Camille Shimun after the attempt to renew his mandate had been blocked and after departure of the Sixth Fleet which had rushed to the help of the Lebanese government following the revolutionary victory in Iraq.

The Party played a leading role in this insurrection by starting it off in Tripoli before it broke out in the rest of the country. It was one of the principal instigators in Beirut, Baalbek, Sidon, Tyre, Nabtiya and Akkar. It dissociated itself from the traditional movements which also took part, by its care in avoiding any avowals and by uncovering the selfish opportunism of some of the traditional leaders. It energetically and openly opposed the action of the American Sixth Fleet which had landed marines on the Lebanese beaches, an attitude which accentuated the differences with some of the traditional opposition leaders who kept silent on this subject.

Despite attempts to isolate the Party by the United Arab Republic's information services, which did not take the people's view on the unfolding of events, its active participation in the insurrection of 1958 had a big effect on its penetration amongst the people and also on its membership which, after the Lebanese regional congress

had been held a few months later, quadrupled itself.

After a few months had passed, the nationalistic revolutionary wave which had gained new impetus with the proclamation of the Egyptian-Syrian union, began to subside. This was the result of the divisions in the Iraqi progressive camp between the nationalists and the communists, and also in the ranks of the Union nationalist movements between the Ba'th and Abd-an-Nasser who had differing viewpoints on the application of this unique experiment of union.

During the period of the Union, the Ba'th movement experienced, in the words of Michel Aflaq «the deepest and most violent crisis in its history. It had contributed to the birth of an historic event in the union between Syria and Egypt. Shortly afterwards it suffered the cruel disappointment of seeing its project watered down in its implementation. The crisis for the Arab vanguard is even more acute and complex since, with time, it has come to realise that it did not measure up to the size of the project and was not capable of sustaining and protecting it».

The Ba'th was aware of the historic meaning of the first real experiment of union in Arab modern history. It was aware also of the importance of the imperialist and reactionary conspiracy aimed against it. But being a democratic people's movement, it realised that the democratic content of this union was one of the conditions for its development and progress and the guarantee of its continuance. It was therefore necessary to level criticism at certain non-democratic practices which had occurred and hindered the role of the mass organisations in the development and protection of the experiment. This had opened up a breach into which reactionary and

imperialist agents were able to move in order to carry out their plot. The result was the breakdown of the union on February 28th. 1961.

Since it is a nationalist movement for unity, the Ba'th realised that the success of the pilot union, and the kernel of this union, would be determined by the ability to hold on to this vision of unity in all its forms and aspects. The dangers which threatened it, as Michel 'Aflaq said on the very day that the new republic was born «the most serious dangers are those which are not immediately apparent; the gravest of them is that there still remains the vestiges of the mentality and interests associated with division and that the union has been woven with the threads of division. This may mean that contradictions will arise and the experiment fail». (February 23rd. 1958)

On the eve of union, the Party gave a warning of the mortal danger which threatened it. The General Secretary said on February 20th. «If this republic's actions are confined to local internal matters and if it does not fulfil its duty to its brothers in other countries, its very existence will be threatened».

Some of the most important of the differences between the Ba'th and the Nasser government were the anti-democratic practices, the signs of domination of one country by the other, and the tendency to retire within itself. The Party was always trying to minimise these differences so that they would not affect the union, through its bulletins, communiqués and everyday politics. On the other hand, there were many organisations such as the information service and the civil service which spent their time, day and night, in amplifying these differences in

order to widen the split between the factions of the Arab revolutionary movement.

As a result of these errors, some Ba'thist ministers had to resign and certain spokesmen of the regime spared no effort in attacking the past and the militant activities of the Ba'thists. But the Party always tried to look only at the positive sides of the union experiment and the government of the U.A.R. When relations were at their most difficult, it hastened to support the socialist measures promulgated on July 22nd. 1961, underlining the importance of worker participation in putting them into effect.

Its attitude towards the breakdown in September was clear. It considered that it was the outcome of an imperialist and reactionary plot which had taken advantage of certain mistakes to destroy the union. It called for its re-establishment on a popular democratic basis. It stubbornly opposed the government which followed upon the breakdown. This government suspended the Al-Ba'th newspaper in October 1962 although not more than thirteen issues had appeared; it court-martialled some Ba'th officers, some of whom were condemned to death for their union activities, and it prosecuted its leaders and militants. The Party's policies were the object of violent attacks in the mass media, in which joined all those who had contributed to the breakdown whatever their political complexion. But in the end, the Party made a powerful effort towards the downfall of the regime on March 8th. 1963. All of this is irrefutable evidence of the Party's wish for union and its nationalist identity.

In any event, the attitude which it had to adopt was a very delicate one. With the Union government it had to

preserve the union and criticise the mistakes. With the post-Union government it had to oppose it and call for the re-establishment of the union. This headlong haste threw it into violent internal crises. Some, during the union, wanted the Party to abandon its popular democratic and revolutionary values as well as its historic and militant role to become a simple cog in the machinery of government. Others, after the breakdown, wanted it to become a tool of the separatists. However, in three national congresses, the 3rd. held between August 27th. and September 1st. 1959, the 4th. in August 1960 and the 5th. in May 1962, the Party succeeded in reversing these trends and defining a new starting point on the basis of its previous experience and the crisis which the Arab revolution was undergoing. From its experience of union and its breakdown, it was able to strengthen its unitary, democratic and progressive features and its historical role while perfecting its revolutionary techniques with the mass of the people.

Although the union experiment was a painful experience, this period saw the implantation and growth of the organisation in several Arab countries where it had hitherto not existed, especially in the Maghreb, Tunisia and Libya, in the Sudan, in the Arabian peninsula and North Yemen.

In Libya, the Party's influence became so strong that the reactionary authorities, in August 1961, believed that the Ba'thist youth was preparing to overthrow the monarchy. They arrested more than a hundred Ba'thist militants from amongst the trade union and student leaders, sectors in which the Party had been playing an important rôle.

In the Sudan, the movement began in university and

student circles with the struggle against the dictatorship of Ibrahim Abboud (1958-1964). The first Sudanese militants, amongst whom was Mohammed Sulayman, were sent to prison on several occasions. They took part in demonstrations and helped the people to overthrow the corrupt military regime.

In the Arabian peninsula, the organisation began to take shape even though up until then it had only had an influence with the students in the universities of Iraq, Syria, Egypt and the Lebanon. It now began to spread amongst the working class of the eastern region and the students and intellectuals in other towns, especially Riyadh.

In North Yemen, the organisation came into being through the students who had returned to their country. It spread in student and military circles and gave the Party a special role in the revolution of September 26th. 1962 which ended the monarchy. One of its most important leaders was Lt. Ali Abd-al-Ghani, a young Ba'thist who became vice-President of the Revolutionary Council. The Minister for Foreign Affairs was the seasoned Ba'thist Muhsan al-Ayni, another example of the eminent part played by the Party's young men in preparing the revolution.

In the Lebanon, the Party emerged from the insurrection with greater strength, with more experience, and more firmly rooted amongst the people. From then on, it took on the responsibility for 'national' activity since the Party's headquarters had been transferred there after its dissolution in Syria and the persecution it was enduring in other countries. On the instructions of the National Directorate, it applied for official registration. Its revolutionary and nationalist activities were

concentrated on social and regional work of a militant character and it played an important part in the preparations for the 3rd. and 4th. national congresses, held in the Lebanon.

An important Party activity at the time was the provision of evidence of solidarity with the people's movements in other Arab countries; the Algerian revolution, the struggle for Arabism in Iraq and the Palestine question. For the latter, the Party proposed the creation of a people's army of liberation for Palestine, and in March 1961 called for a united front to achieve this goal. But apart from this, it continued to broaden its base by leading the struggle together with the Iraq Petroleum Company's workers, with the peasants, the tobacco growers and the students who were fighting for the establishment of a Lebanese University. Its platform was its newspaper, *As-Sahafa* (The Press), but this had to cease publication for financial reasons in December 1960. The following February its place was taken by the underground newspaper «*Al-Ishtiraki*».

In the legislative elections of 1960, the Party Directorate decided that they would only put up one candidate, Abd-al-Majid ar-Rafi'i, in Tripoli. His successful campaign gave him a majority of more than 14,000 votes, but last minute falsifications robbed him of his victory.

In Jordan, there were many attempts to reorganise the Party after the government attack of 1957. But the break-away of Rimawi and the electioneering character of the Party made it an easy target for the government. The militants, however, persevered in their attempts at reconstruction, risking imprisonment, fines and exile. In doing this, they made it clear to the Party as to what its

attitude should be towards most of the political events which occurred in Jordan and the region.

In Iraq, the years 1959-1963 were one of the most spectacular in the people's national struggle led by the Ba'th... When Kassim's regime deviated from the unitary and democratic goals of the July 14th. revolution in order to win the support of the Communist Party, the Ba'th opposed this trend and prepared for sacrifices and a bitter fight.

At the first appearance of deviationary signs by the Communists, the Party immediately chided them while being careful to maintain the cohesion in the ranks of the progressives. It refused to react to the many provocations offered and called for a united stand (Al-Tali'a, November 1958). It continued to do so after the massacres of the minority groups following the abortive uprising of Shawwaf on March 8th. 1959. On April 8th. the Party published a communiqué stating that, in spite of what had happened and the waves of arrests, the way remained open for the situation to be rectified. But these appeals received no answer.

The persecution of the Ba'thists and the national factions increased: but at the same time the Party's influence with the people grew stronger. Then, in October 1959, there was an attempt to assassinate Kassim. The attempt was criticised by the national and regional congresses because it was a decision taken without consultation and was not part of an overall plan to overthrow the regime. On the other hand, it was a demonstration of the courage and inflexible will of the militants. This became apparent during the trials, when a number of young militants were condemned to death. The Party started a campaign in Iraq and abroad to save

them, as a result of which their sentences were commuted.

During these courageous battles with the government, the Party took care to prevent itself from being used by Kassim against the Communists after he had broken with them. This was explained in an internal bulletin dated April 8th. 1960. In a further one in May, it condemned the attacks made on the Communists at a time when it was to the government's advantage to do so. In the name of the National Directorate, the General Secretary of the Party sent a letter to the Iraqi regional directorate warning them against being drawn into acts of vengeance on the Communists.

In 1960, the Ba'th had spread into all sections of the population, and at the end of June 1960, published its newspaper, *The Workers Conscience*. Two years later, in the summer, it was involved in trade union struggles, exposing itself to all kinds of pressure and intimidation. Nevertheless it continued to win through and its success was reflected in the increased influence it had gained amongst the working class.

In the light of the Communist Party's and the Nationalist Party's attitudes towards Kassim, the Ba'th created, in 1961, a nationalist front to include the Independence Party, the Nationalist League and the Arab Nationalist Movement —which withdrew shortly afterwards— as well as all the nationalist factions. Under this banner the Party set out to overthrow the regime once the conditions were ripe. At the beginning of October 1961, the Party proclaimed the slogan of 'Down with the government'.

During the negotiations between the government and the oil companies in October 1960, the Party stated its

position on a number of points. It was the beginning of a national policy, of a kind, for oil. It proposed the retrieval of all land which was not yet being exploited by the oil companies (this was law N°. 80), the creation of a national oil company, the acquisition of share capital in the oil companies, the setting up of a programme for Iraqisation, an examination of their accounts, the transfer of their headquarters from London to Baghdad and an increase in Iraq's share of their profits.

In March 1961, the Party started the famous petrol strike during which strikers clashed with the authorities. Eight of the militants fell. This battle underlined the link between the Party's national and socialist struggle. In November, it demanded the nationalization of the French owned part of I.P.C. as a reprisal for the attacks on Algeria. This was the first specific and practical use of the oil weapon in the battle.

1962 was the real preparatory year for the revolution of February 1963. The Party carried on the fight at all levels. It led it in workers trade union elections during the summer, and, in the winter, for the students. This latter began by a strike in a Baghdad secondary school, joined subsequently by the Faculties and Institutes. It then spread to the primary schools outside of Baghdad, linking thereby students grievances with political demands and preparing Iraq, after a strike of six weeks, for the people's Ramadan revolution (February 1963).

Many of Iraq's sons have been sacrificed in the struggle to preserve the Arab character of the country, but they have always joined in the Party's and the nation's fight in all its phases. It supported the United Arab Republic, even while criticising its machinery. From the beginning it strenuously opposed separation. It

fought often for the Algerian revolution. When Ben Bella came on a visit in 1962, he was surprised by the strength of the Party. In defiance of the dictatorship, its members lined the route shouting for long life for the Algerian revolution in the person of its leader, «Greetings Ben Bella from the Ba'th Party, long live Ben Bella».

Ben Bella then asked his companions: «Why has this party not taken over power?»

Only a few months elapsed before the Party launched the first armed people's revolution in contemporary Arab history.

Chapter Seven

The First Experience of Power in Iraq

(February 8th.—November 18th. 1963)

When the Party took over power in Iraq after the revolution of Ramadan 14 (February 8th. 1963), the highest hopes were placed in it since it clearly had the people's support. Furthermore, it gave the appearance of being an organised political party with a philosophy and a revolutionary force which had never been seen before in the region.

Iraq embarked immediately on the road to unity, first of all with the tripartite Charter of April 17th. between Iraq, Syria and Egypt, from which President Nasser said he would withdraw in his speech of July 22nd. 1963, the anniversary of the Egyptian revolution, and subsequently the union between Iraq and Syria which was approved by the 6th. National Congress between October 5th. and 23rd. On October 9th. during the congress, the first step, the union of the armed forces, was proclaimed. This revolution also played an important part in overthrowing the government which had taken over in Syria after the separation. As Michel

'Aflaq said, it came to avenge the unity of the plot which had brought about the separation.

Unfortunately, many errors took place in this experiment and were denounced by the 8th. National Congress when it analysed the setback of the Iraqi regime. There had been no serious study of the country's economic and social situation. The opposition mentality which permeated the Party during the underground struggle, continued when it was in power. The new leaders lacked experience. The Regional Directorate failed to carry out its responsibilities within the Party, which caused a break between the rank and file and the leadership. The military establishment was also completely neglected. The selection of people for certain key positions was done on the basis of personal relationships rather than Party criteria. There was a withdrawal into itself and aggressiveness towards the army as well as disputes between the Party and the National Guard. Furthermore, the National Directorate was slow in taking decisions at the opportune moment, and, finally, no major revolutionary measures were enacted. All these factors helped the reactionary elements with their plot to overthrow the regime on November 18th. 1963.

In spite of the atmosphere of division within the Party after the November coup and the increase in mutual accusation and suspicion between the militants and the leaders, the Party was able to reorganise itself and overcome all the difficulties and dangers. Less than ten months later it began to prepare to overthrow the regime. Unfortunately the plan was discovered on September 5th. 1964 and the government took the opportunity to give the Party a hard knock. A large wave of arrests took place and tens of thousands of militants,

their friends and supporters were taken. Comrade Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr was one of the first to be arrested.

Those who escaped the net continued the struggle with a rare courage. Comrade Saddam Hussein was at their head, fighting underground a few weeks after the persecution started. He sent a recording from his hiding place to Damascus on November 7th. 1964 in which he described the savageness of the reactionary campaign against the Party and the form of the conspiracy against Iraq. He promised the militants and the Arab people that the fight would go on until the reactionary regime was overthrown.

After comrade Saddam was arrested, the Party cells in the secret organisation fought on in spite of repression and arrest. The Party in other countries gave its help to the militants and the Iraqi people. In Syria a week of solidarity was organised between November 6th.-12th. 1964 with demonstrations and meetings, and Radio Damascus had a daily broadcast, in the evening, on Iraq.

When the June 5th. 1967 defeat took place, a large number of militant Ba'thists were still in prison in Iraq, a fact which the Arab people noted as being a connection between the defeat and the November 18th. 1963 conspiracy against the Party in Iraq and the February 23rd. 1966 conspiracy in Syria.

Chapter Eight

The Experience of Power in Syria

(March 8th. 1963—February 23rd. 1966)

The downfall of Kassim in Iraq removed one of the main pillars of support of the separatist Syrian government. Its collapse from then on was only a matter of time, accelerated by the increase in the popular wave of support for unity and because the reactionary character of the regime was becoming apparent once all the false progressive pretences borrowed from certain past movements had been unmasked.

So when a group of Ba'thist officers decided to bring it down on March 8th. 1963, they encountered no difficulty and succeeded in winning the support of the pro-Nasser officers. The result was a nationalist alliance, reflected in the National Revolution Council and in the composition of the government. When the cabinet was appointed, the Party's leading role was underlined because of its long existence in the country and its unequivocal position towards separation. In addition, another branch of the Ba'th had taken over power in

Iraq, and in Syria itself, many Ba'thist officers had been involved in the move to overthrow the separatist regime.

The major rôle which it had in the Syrian government and the revolutionary experiment in Iraq, led the Party to propose a tripartite union of Egypt, Iraq and Syria. It was in fact, a new form of a Charter for Union, issued on April 17th. and which took account of all the previous mistakes. It particularly stressed the democratic and socialist aspects of union, and the liberty of the political and people's organisations, while taking account also of the circumstances prevailing in each country at the time of the ratification of federal union.

This advance proposal triggered off an immense wave of nationalist and revolutionary fervour in the region. In Jordan, demonstrations of support took place calling for membership also of the new united republic. The government suppressed them severely and threw thousands into prison including the Party's leaders.

A wave of patriotism also spread over the Arabian peninsula. Many militants for union turned to the Party, placing their hopes in it and offering their services to prepare for the change. In Bahrein there were popular uprisings. In the Lebanon, the Party and the Palestinian organisation became active amongst the Palestinian people and formed a group of sharpshooters under the Party's leadership. Many Ba'thists left their work to go to Damascus in the expectation of concrete action. Preliminary contacts were made with the Arabs in occupied Palestine, especially with «Al-Ardh» (The Earth) organisation. Young Ba'thists carried out reconnaissance operations in the interior, including Jalal Ka'Wash one of its most well known members and one of the first to join the «Fath» in 1965. But this

organisation did not last long because the Party was engrossed with the exercise of government and with internal problems.

Just as union raised the hopes of the Arab people, so it raised the fears of Zionism and imperialism. The conspiracy against it started immediately, by attempts to recreate in every sector, suspicions and resentment and to renew the old quarrels between the two protagonists on which union depended, the Ba'th and Nasser.

Certain members of the Egyptian government, known for their 'suspect' connections (some were unmasked later on, like Mustafa and Ali Amin), set about emphasising the differences in the press and on the radio. By making exaggerated claims about the Nasserite elements in Syria and Iraq, they tried to force through changes to the detriment of the Ba'th Party.

These moves aroused fears amongst the Ba'thists that the same mistakes as before would be repeated, and these fears were widely exploited by new members of the Party who were unaware of its unity policy, its struggle and its history. This attitude was just what the disloyal members of the Egyptian regime were looking for. The quarrel broke out several times between the Ba'th and Nasser, but on each occasion the Party hastened to resolve it. The final conciliation attempt was the despatch of a Party delegation with the authority to settle all matters of contention, on the morning of July 18th. 1963. But during the flight, they were surprised to learn that a bloody attempt at a coup d'état by Nasserite elements had taken place against the Syrian Ba'th. This only aggravated the conflict and led President Nasser to announce Egypt's withdrawal from the tripartite charter for union on July 22nd. Nasser was able subsequently to

unmask a certain number of the disloyal men who had sabotaged his relations with the Ba'th. Several Egyptian sources are aware of this fact.

But the most serious and revolting plot which the Party has ever had to face was that organised by the factions hostile to unity, to democracy and to progressiveness. The history of the government in Syria, which lasted three years, was that of a violent conflict between the Party with its tradition of unity, its long militant experience and its nation-wide organisation, and a ruling group, exclusive in its outlook, thinking and practice, and stranger to the Party's history and militant popular principles, and relying mainly upon internal army loyalties to maintain it in power.

During the conflict with the Party, the group gave itself various names. Sometimes it called itself the «military committee», pretending thereby to represent the military establishment whereas in fact, it had imposed its authority on the military supposedly in the name of the Ba'th (as came out during the army congress of April 1965). Sometimes it regarded itself as the Regional Directorate so that it could deal with local regulations. This gave it the opportunity to bypass the militants who had been Party members for a long time and to infiltrate a large number of its own supporters, some of whom belonged to the regional directorate even though they had not been members at the time of the March takeover. They even called themselves the «exclusive Syrians» who had left the Party after the 5th. National Congress. The March movement had proved the falsehood of their logic and of their alliance with the separatists.

The setback to the Iraq experiment in November

1963 and the divisions which ensued at the 7th. National Congress, encouraged this group to reveal its exclusive, closely-knit aspects and its hostility towards the Party. Its leaders, after the counter-revolution in Iraq in November lost the excuse which had made them turn to the Party after the February revolution and before the March movement.

The National Directorate tried by every means to redirect the governments course, to strengthen its ties with the people and democracy, and to open up relationships with the patriotic, progressive and unitary movements abroad, with the countries in the socialist camp and the liberation movements throughout the world. It was in this way that the Party should have demonstrated its unifying, progressive and universal principles and its engagement, in the historical sense, in the Ba'th movement of the Arab people, legacy of the Arab heritage, a movement with a revolutionary ethic in its methods and its approach. (Speech by the General Secretary in 1965 on the anniversary of February 8th).

But all these attempts were received sometimes with indifference and contempt, sometimes by rebellion such as in December 1964 when the Regional Directorate refused to carry out the decisions of the National Directorate for the definition of the realtionships between the Party and the government.

Then came the 8th. National Congress in April 1965 whose purpose was to acquaint the national organisations with the crisis in Syria and to explain clearly what was going on. The Congress discussed various formulae which only scratched the surface of the crisis without bringing it to an end. The National Directorate then elected Dr. Munif Razzaz as General Secretary of the

Party, Comrade Michel 'Aflaq had refused many times to put forward his candidature to the National Directorate. But the Assembly continued to regard his candidature as being the main strength of the congress and elected him nevertheless to the National Directorate, but he subsequently boycotted its meetings.

However, the situation evolved and the group which ruled «the army in the name of the Party, the Party in the name of the army and the people in the name of the Party and the army» revealed itself. The military members broke away from it in groups. Disputes broke out after the attempts to apply the Party decisions to forbid the overlapping of responsibilities between Party, government and army. A special regional congress was held in August 1965. Some Ba'th officers had been arrested under the pretext of the internal regulations. This brought the crisis out into the open and made it possible for the National Directorate to intervene directly. On December 21st. it took the historic decision to dissolve the regional directorate, to take over control and to appoint a Supreme Directorate to help guide the Party in Syria and to recreate the Presidential Council. Comrade Shibli Aysami was appointed vice-President and Salah al-Bitar asked to form a government.

An enlarged national Assembly was convened and the Party's leaders took care that it included representatives of the majority of the country's progressive and nationalist movements; approaches were also made to progressive Arab groups abroad. This was so successful that the ruling group began to feel the reins of power slipping out of its hands. It began to plot against the National Directorate and the measures it had introduced. The coup d'état took place on February 23rd. 1966.

A number of Party leaders were arrested after a resistance which was especially lively in front of the residence of the Chief of State Amin Hafez, at that time a member of the National Directorate. He took part personally and amongst the killed and wounded were some of his own children. In Aleppo, resistance was put up by young civilian and military members of the Party who took over the radio for a time. These activities were the beginning of a widespread resistance which the Party continues to this day with its civilian and military leaders and militants.

The Putschists succeeded in arresting a number of leaders but others escaped and continued to fight in Syria for several months. Among them was the founder, Michel 'Aflaq, and the General Secretary, Munif Razzaz. Others were arrested on the anniversary of the Party's foundation, April 7th. 1966 included Shibli Aysami, the Assistant General Secretary.

On September 8th., Salim Hatun, one of the participants in the putsch of February 23rd., made an attempted coup d'état. This was used as an excuse for the most widespread reign of terror ever experienced by the Party in Syria. Thousands were arrested and tortured. Some were executed and others died from their ill-treatment. All this was done in the name of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party.

In order to justify this split, the junta called itself «left wing» and embarked on a verbal auction on national and social matters. Then came the attack of June 1967 and the renegade Party started to blow the trumpets for a people's war of liberation while at the same time ordering the army to abandon the almost impregnable position on the Golan Heights without a

fight. It is clear that, generally speaking, the defeat and in particular, the loss of Golan, the support given to a negotiated settlement of the Palestinian question, are the result of the premises of February 23rd. and, before that, the conflict between the Party and its counterfeit.

The history of the Syrian experience is that of a violent internal conflict, for most of the time between the Party and a clique which wanted to change and diminish its rôle and characteristics. But even so, the Party succeeded in introducing a series of social and political changes which, had they been allowed to continue and develop, would have made Syria into a beacon for the entire region.

The social changes had finally liquidated the last bastions of feudalism through the new agricultural reform law of June 1963, as well as that for agricultural production designed to protect the farmer and provide for his basic needs.

A series of nationalizations firmly set the course in a non-capitalist direction —banks and insurance companies from April 30th. 1963, external trade— imports in February and exports in May 1965, the industrial sector in November and the oil resources in December. Although some of these measures were taken in the midst of an internal conflict and as a means of rallying Party support in order to redress the situation, they were all carried out within the framework of the Ba'th strategy and in accordance with the resolutions of the national and regional congresses, following the advice and research of the National Directorate's department of economic affairs.

On the national scene, the Party succeeded in making the Palestine question one of the main points in

its militant activity. The Syrian government was the only one which allowed the fedayeen to act freely as from January 1965. It was also able to transform the diplomatic climate amongst the Arabs in order to initiate discussions on the Israeli plan for diverting the waters of the Jordan to the Negev so that thousands of Jewish immigrants could be settled there.

In spite of the differences existing with other Arab governments, the Party decided, during the discussions on Palestine in the 8th. National Congress, not to mention them so that all could move towards a united confrontation with the main enemy, Zionism. It resisted all attempts to sidetrack the Palestine question into discussion of forms of partition, paying indemnities and resettling the Palestinians in other countries. It was in these circumstances that Syria participated in the first three Arab Summit Conferences in Cairo, Alexandria and Casablanca. While there, she was able to adopt a posture which brought the Party out of the difficult state of isolation in which it had been placed.

Syria also supported the liberation movements in all the Arab countries. It supported the revolutions in Eritrea and the Yemen, and always gave help to the Algerian revolution which was undergoing pressure from the Egyptian government.

On the international scene, Syria played an important part with the non-aligned countries. It supported all the liberation movements in the world and tried to improve relations with the socialist countries. This was difficult in the light of previous problems between the Party and the Arab communist movement and the lack of knowledge on the part of world communism at the time as to the historic national, anti-imperialist organi-

sation which was the Ba'th, and also, of course, the instability of the situation in Syria.

Although the socialist camp, from the beginning, welcomed the «left wing» leaders with open arms, the Party did not take a negative view of this. But in National Directorate statements and in articles in its newspaper Al-Ahrar, published in Beirut, it asked the Soviet Union to make a more detailed study of the Party position, and, forgetting past quarrels, to lay new foundations for the relationships between the Arab revolutionary movement and world communism.

The experiences of March 8th. 1963 and the plot of February 23rd. 1966 had enormous repercussions on the 'national' activities of the Party. The 'disowning' move of February 23rd. impeded the Party's struggle in Iraq for some time. It was subsequently used to sow dissension and went as far as giving the names of the Iraqi Party leaders even though they were in hiding.

A few weeks after taking over power, the Damascus regime encouraged king Hussein to start a campaign of arrests in the Party and national movement. The same thing with the Lebanese government, ten days after the putsch, who arrested a large number of its leaders, and this for the first time in the history of the Lebanese Party. They were accused of «activities against an Arab government and of inciting an Arab army against its commanders». And when Radio Damascus confused public opinion by supposedly taking the side of the arrested leaders, the putschists asked the Lebanese Information service to hold them in prison.

The arrests went on for three weeks, something unheard of in the Lebanese tradition of liberal democracy, and it was a twofold form of revenge against the

Party. The Lebanese government, and the Secret Police in particular, were avenging the Party's attitude towards the affair of the militant Palestinian, Jalal Ka'wash who died under torture in a Lebanese prison on January 10th. 1966. The Party reported it in its newspaper Al-Ahrar and organised demonstrations which resulted in a number of casualties, whereas the Lebanese had been able to silence all other protests, the patriotic movements included, on this subject. Secondly, the Lebanese authorities were trying to curry favour with the putschist regime. The latter had been embarrassed by the speed and violence of the Party's reaction in the Lebanon, both by the statements of the Regional Directorate and by the special regional congress of February 28th. 1966 which had described the coup d'état as «a separatist, reactionary and dictatorial act». The Lebanese branch had also supported the department of 'national relations' set up in Beirut by the National Directorate with the objective of making contact with Party organisations to explain the Syrian situation and to «prepare an emergency national congress to define Party policy vis-à-vis the deviationists».

This double challenge only strengthened the Party's determination, and it continued to overcome all the difficulties and dangers. It continued to publish its newspaper Al-Ahrar from premises which were bombed several times by agents of the Syrian information service. It continued to lead the people's national struggle, especially in the days preceding the June war. It set up committees for aid to Palestine and organised collections. The youth of the Party joined the fight and some of its leaders, after the war, went to Damascus to care for the wounded.

The putschist movement had no effect on the Party branches in the Sudan, Tunisia and Kuwait, for example, nor on the student organisations in Turkey, Yugoslavia, Italy, Great Britain or France. But nevertheless, there were some misunderstandings in the organisational work in several Arab and other countries. These facts indicate more and more clearly the undermining influence of the putschists against the first and largest nationalist, unitary and socialist party in the Arab world.

Chapter Nine

The Party after the Defeat

(June 5th. 1967—end 1974)

At the time of the June 5th. defeat, most of the Party leaders and militants were either in the prisons of Syria, Iraq and Jordan, or were being persecuted and driven into exile, or were under close surveillance in other countries. A necessary preliminary to the success of the conspiracy against the unity, liberty and sovereignty of the Arab nation was the neutralising of the national movement and especially those in its vanguard. The Ba'thists realised more than ever before, that the crises and bitter experiences they were undergoing were part of the conspiracy aimed at the nation through them in order that the instrument for revolution be destroyed. They also realised that action on a pan-Arab scale, at this crucial moment in history, had become an even more urgent duty than ever.

The preparations for the 9th. Congress took place at a time of the strengthening of the national unity of the Party and was an opportunity to learn the lessons of the

internal crisis and the national disaster. It was to be held in mid-February 1968. Comrade Michel 'Aflaq, who had been in Brazil since 1966, sent a message saying: «The Arab people are once more being offered the opportunity for serious revolutionary action, a historic opportunity such as occurred a quarter of a century ago when our movement was founded. Today a new movement can be built on solid ground». This message renewed the zeal of the Party and stimulated its activities in the very difficult circumstances, when every government, institution, movement and party was under severe criticism for the parts they had played in the militant activities of the period before the defeat.

After the 9th. National Congress (February, 1968)

While the 9th. National Congress was taking place in these delicate circumstances, the Party organisations had begun to regroup their forces and in a fair way, to resume their militant activities. In Iraq, the Party was re-established amongst the people and after June 5th., led the demonstrations. It was successful in the trade union elections and became again the leader of the teacher's union which had great influence in the country, as well as in other unions.

In Syria, in the most difficult circumstances, the Party set about reorganising its ranks after its militants had been released. This was on June 10th. 1967 when the Golan fell and Damascus lay open to the enemy divisions. The same thing happened in Jordan. In the Sudan, the militants were able to introduce the Regional Directorate's memorandum into the meeting of the Arab

Summit Conference, much to the astonishment of the kings and presidents and the disavowals of the Syrian delegation. In Tunisia, the ba'thist youth played an important rôle in the student strikes and demonstrations in protest against the severity of the sentences of the demonstrators of June 5th.

In the Lebanon, the Party had been able to preserve its organisation after the split, and play a part in the popular debates before, during and after the war. It then decided to make common cause it the Palestine armed struggle, and a number of young people, mostly Palestinians, went off to one of the fedayeen training camps. During the summer of 1967, the Party formed an alliance for the support of the fedayeen from Lebanese territory, and this became the nucleus of the widespread national support which subsequently built up around the Resistance.

The 9th. Congress brought together delegates from Kuwait, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the Sudan, Tunisia and from student organisations abroad. It was a propitious moment, therefore, for the Party, in a special paper, to undertake a full analysis of the internal crisis and of the June defeat, and to draw up the strategy to be followed in the future. Emphasis was mainly on joint activities, the people's armed struggle, and the contact with other revolutionary, socialist movements in the world, with the Soviet Union in the first place. The Party also offered the hand of friendship to all Arab patriotic and nationalist movements and to forget past negative aspects.

The organisations followed the lines laid down by the congress. In Iraq, the Party reinforced its links with the Palestine Resistance. It organised a demonstration in its

support after the Israeli attack on Karama. It was then the turn of the regional secretary, Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr to speak and to recommend the Ba'thist officers of the Iraqi troops stationed in Jordan to keep close contact with the Resistance and provide it with all the help it needed. This action strengthened it against the enemy in the valley of the Jordan.

In Syria, the Party proposed the formation of a nationalist progressive front with the opposition —the Arab Socialist Union, the Arab Nationalist Movement and the Arab Socialists. This initiative scared the government which started a wave of arrests, mainly of our military and civilian comrades. They underwent severe torture and were kept in prison for several months, until March 1969, when they were released at the time of the conflict between the two wings of the regime.

In the Lebanon, the Party continued to collaborate with the Palestinian Resistance and took part in all the demonstrations of support in preparation for it moving on to Lebanese soil. The most important of these was the one at the funeral of the first Lebanese sharpshooter to be killed in the ranks of the Resistance, in April 1968, and the demonstration in protest against the Israeli military parade in Jerusalem on May 2nd. There was also the surprise demonstration at Beirut airport on July 17th. 1968, on the arrival of the first American diplomat in the region since the war. Stones and bottles were thrown by the Party youth and he was wounded in the hand. The Lebanese authorities arrested some of the Party militants and one of their leaders.

*The revolution of July 17th. and 30th:
A new experiment and the long term prospects*

The action, however, which made the greatest impact on the Party's history was its success in Iraq in overthrowing the reactionary government of Aref on July 17th. 1968 after an exhausting five year struggle. Thirteen days later, the Party completed this historic act by purging certain elements which had imposed themselves on it.

The Revolution of July 17th. and 30th. placed the Party in a strong position in Arab political life. All eyes were turned towards it and it had to shoulder new responsibilities. It was the historic moment to prove the extent to which it had learned the lessons of previous experience and setbacks.

The Revolution was able to chart a course through all kinds of dangers and difficulties and to make steady progress. It did this so well that after only a few years it became the admiration of the Arab world and of many nations. It was clear that its leaders were able to maintain a balance between the demands of a revolutionary doctrine and the restrictions imposed by the complexities of reality.

The Revolution inherited difficult political, social, economic and military problems which were the result of under-development and imperialist policy, and these were further complicated by the conspiracies of reactionary movements. A further complication was the immaturity and confusion in revolutionary outlook of many in the Iraqi patriotic and nationalist movements.

The regional congress at the end of November 1968, four months after the revolution, defined the policy to be followed for dealing with this situation. The first pro-

blem was that of the relationships between the national movements. By patience and perseverance, it was possible to get to the heart of the matter, to bypass the inert stupidities and suspicions and to establish clearly defined areas of cooperation between the Party and the other movements. The fruit of these efforts was the creation of the National Progressive Front on July 16th. 1973.

This course was evident from the early days of the revolution, when the new regime ordered the release of political prisoners, the reinstatement of civil servants dismissed for political reasons, and the possibility for those in exile to return to Iraq. In spite of ups and downs, this policy was maintained, and in November 1971, the Party put forward the project for a National Action Charter as the basis for a programme for the Front. Discussion of the project went on until its finalisation at the end of the summer of 1973, and was accompanied by various measures designed to reinforce the links between the partners. It was through these that the Iraqi Communist Party and the Kurdistan Democratic Party received permission to publish their newspapers. They were part of the government and considered to be allies before the Charter was signed or the Front officially created.

For the same reasons of internal strength and because of its nationalist and humanitarian concern for the rights of the minorities living amongst the Arabs, the Party set out to find a democratic solution to the Kurdish problem. The outcome was the historic Declaration of March 11th. 1970, which put an end to the fighting in the north and recognised the principle of autonomy and national rights for the Kurds in Iraq. The principles were quickly translated into political fact,

ended the emergency, united the country and released the Kurdish people's energies for reconstruction and development and for the struggle against imperialism and Zionism.

It needed great flexibility and infinite patience to get to this point. The Party leaders had to make a clear and categoric distinction between the legitimate wishes of the Kurds for their national rights and the unexpressed wish of others to allow the Kurdish question to be exploited and used according to circumstances in order to put pressure on Iraq for gaining economic or political concessions, or even concessions on its basic principles.

Exactly four years after declaration of March 11th. and on the date decided upon for its implementation, the Party leadership promulgated the law on autonomy. During this period many methods had been tried to bring Barzani to discuss the project with the other national progressive parties, who had been kept informed of the negotiations between the Ba'th and Barzani's representatives. On its promulgation, the law had already been amended to take account of the comments and proposals of progressive Iraqi organisations and individuals. It was implemented and the legislative and executive machinery put in place. The firmness of the revolutionary authorities combined with the refusal of the great majority of the Kurdish people to return to a state of civil war, is the explanation for Barzani's isolation. From then on, he was forced to show unadorned his links with the external factions hostile to Iraq's national revolutionary path, which wanted to damage the unity of the country.

The Party considered that the unity of the people and national movements provided the solid ground needed

for joining battle with the foreign monopolies in order to liberate Iraq and to achieve its economic independence, the key to political independence. The Party also realised that in order to have complete success, economic, political and security conditions should be as sound as possible. A campaign was started, therefore, a few months after the revolution and as soon as the Secret Service had acquired all the information, against the espionage networks, of which the main threads had been uncovered by the Party apparatus before the revolution. The campaign ended in the execution of the spies and cleansed the interior of agents and saboteurs.

The Party also realised that for the economy to be dependent on one product, oil, would put it at the mercy of world capitalism, and that to be free, it would have to diversify its sources of revenue and supplies. So it made an agreement with Poland in April 1969, by which it was helped in its own exploitation of the sulphur resources. This finally dashed the hopes of the capitalist monopolies of getting their hands on it.

The Party also set about developing agriculture and industry so that they could play a greater part in the country's economic life in diversifying sources of income and creating new jobs. An intensive development in these sectors was planned, and facilities and guarantees provided for the farmers and workers. In the agricultural sector, national income increased from «202 million dinars in 1969, the year following the revolution, to about 302 million in 1972, that is, an annual growth rate of 15.3%». In the conversion industries' sector, national income increased, for the same period, from 103 million dinars to 154 million, and it is probable that this will continue, to reach about 205 million in 1974. In other

words, during the period 1969-1974 the conversion industries will have an annual growth rate of 14%. As leader of the working class movement, the Party has been able to bring about a great number of changes of a socialist nature. On May 20th. 1969, the law for agricultural reform was amended. The indemnities to landowners were abolished as was their right previously to choose the situation for their land. A further law was promulgated in 1970, which represented an important evolution in the protection of farmers and the organisation of the return on agricultural production in a socialist context. This production was demonstrated by the growing importance of State farms, covering 101,000 hectares, collectives farms with 160,000 hectares and cooperative farms which at that time covered more than 4 million hectares. On the other hand, privately owned land, which did not fall into the preceding categories, was not more than 1.4 million hectares. Thus the Party had gone a long way towards liquidating feudalism which had been very deeply rooted in Iraq.

In industry, socialist change was evident in the growing part played by the public sector, through the expansion of the nationalized industries, the starting up of new projects, and the establishment of basic industries such as steel and petro-chemicals, following agreements with a number of countries.

In commerce, the problem was to make a success out of the nationalization of the export/import business and to get rid of the corruption and backwardness of its agencies. The public sector was now 82% compared with 42% before the revolution.

When, at the end of 1971, the government started negotiations with the oil companies, it was solidly based

politically and economically, enjoyed the confidence of the people and had a judicious oil policy. The National Oil Company (I.N.O.C.) had been established, and in August 1969, an agreement was signed with the Soviet Union to help Iraq in exploiting the North Rumeila oilfield. Every advantage had been taken of the increase in oil revenues following the 1971 Teheran agreement. But nevertheless, Iraq had no surplus, and it was with a deficit of 17.6 million dinars in the budget and a total accumulated deficit of 220 million that she went into the nationalization battle.

During this glorious period in the history of the Party and the Iraqi nation, the people and their movements closed their ranks in order to attack the monopolist companies and bring them to their knees. The people demonstrated their readiness for sacrifice and the country was carried away by patriotic enthusiasm. A few days before sending its ultimatum to the companies the Ba'th Party leadership decided to appoint as ministers in the government two members of the Communist Party and two nationalists. This was part of the political preparation for the struggle and in accordance with the Front policy set out in the National Action Charter.

When the period of the ultimatum expired and the companies were putting forward their proposals, the revolution had already made all the necessary political, economic and psychological preparations for a final fight. It categorically rejected the companies' attempts at last minute temporising. On the day planned, the historic day of June 1st., the comrade Party Secretary in Iraq announced the nationalization decree.

The preliminary steps for nationalization having been assured and the conduct of the fight on the political,

economic and technical fronts having been correctly organised, meant that from the first days after the decree, nationalization was moving successfully forward until the final victory on March 1st. 1973.

The nationalization struggle proved one basic truth which does not only affect Iraq, but is valid for all oil producers and consumers. It proves that it is possible for a nation with the will to do so, to extract and sell its oil and to challenge the monopolies. Furthermore, it has revealed the fact that there is a serious lack of energy reserves in the world. The oil companies hastened to make concessions to other oil producers in the form of participation contracts. America started its big campaign on the energy crisis which, for many months, it had refused to acknowledge.

The nationalization victory went beyond the frontiers of the country and was more than an economic victory. It was a national political challenge to the movements hostile to the Arab nation. It confirmed the policy followed by the Party in Iraq since the revolution, of liberation; Iraq opened its country and resources to Arab liberation movements and militant organisations, especially the Palestine revolution and that in Eritrea to which Iraq gave unprecedented moral and material support.

During the period up to the war of October 1973, the revolutionary government in Iraq had one national strategic objective, the liberation of Palestine. It refused to make any concessions on this and rejected all attempts to come to terms with the Zionist enemy in exchange for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all or part of the territory occupied in the 1967 war. Baghdad made efforts to close the Arab ranks in order to prepare the

ground for winning this objective. She prepared a national battle plan to put forward at the tripartite summit conference of July 1970 in Tripoli between Abd-an-Nasser, Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr and Mu'ammar Gadaffi. But on June 19th. the Egyptian government accepted the Rogers plan and the project failed.

On several occasions the Party has made attempts to create a union, especially in March 1972. Comrade Saddam Hussein visited Damascus and Cairo with a project prepared by the Party for an Iraqi, Syrian, Egyptian union for the combat. In January 1973, the Iraqi delegation presented a plan for economic, political and military preparation to the Council of Arab Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Defence. The Iraqi government made several attempts to regroup the Arab countries behind a comprehensive project for unity and leading towards liberation. But these attempts never materialised.

Meanwhile the Egyptian and Syrian governments were preparing for war, limited strategically in place and time. They felt that the situation in Iraq would prevent her from participating because of the threat from Iran and the possibility of fighting breaking out in Kurdistan. Nevertheless, the Iraqi government was counting upon a limited military action in May or June.

On October 2nd. 1973, a few hours after war had broken out, the National and Regional Directorates held a meeting with the Revolution Command Council. They decided to despatch Iraqi forces to the front, even though the war objectives did not correspond with the national strategy adopted by the Party. But the meeting felt that an Iraqi participation could help give additional military weight to the Arab forces and prevent the enemy

from winning new gains which he might use in future negotiations. Participation could also provide a new element which might lead to a change in the effectiveness of the Syrian-Egyptian strategy in that it might, either in whole or in part, further the objectives of Arab liberation. At the least, it could create a favourable atmosphere in which to move towards these objectives.

In order to protect the country's eastern flank and allow troops to move towards the Golan, the Iraqi government re-established diplomatic relations with Iran on October 7th. The army was mobilised and began to move towards the Syrian frontier on the morning of October 7th. The units sent to Syria between October 7th. and 22nd. consisted of two armoured divisions (700 tanks) and three infantry brigades, one of mountain troops and two of the special forces, one squadron of Mig 21s, one of Mig 17s and one of Soukhoy 7s. To this should be added the two squadrons of Hawker Hunters, stationed in Egypt since March, which flew operationally with the Egyptian air force. This represented 75% of the Iraqi air force, 65% of its armour, and 20% of its infantry.

These units played an important role and took part in the fighting around the Golan in spite of the unfavourable strategic conditions under which they moved up to the front to join the battle. They remained in Syria until the fighting stopped; the armistice was made without the Iraqi government being consulted.

Iraq did not only use her armed forces. She made use of the economic weapon by nationalizing the American holdings in the Basra Petroleum Company on October 7th. and the Dutch holdings on October 21st. The Iraqi people supplied their brothers in Syria with oil, economic

aid, munitions and replacement tanks, and showed their readiness to continue with the fight in the framework of an all-out national war of liberation.

The Security Council voted the cease-fire resolution on October 22nd. and Iraq was the first of the Arab countries to reject it and demand that the fight go on. It tried hard to persuade the Syrian government to do so. This attitude reflected the Party's steadfast view on solutions involving capitulation which had been forced on the nation in order to liquidate the Palestinian question and oppose the Arab people's desire for freedom and unity.

On the international stage, under the Party's leadership, Iraq became one of the bastions of the anti-imperialist struggle. It was one of the first to break the international boycott of the German Democratic Republic by recognising it *de jure* on May 1st. 1969. It also laid the foundations for cooperation with the socialist countries, firstly with the Soviet Union, and with the non-aligned countries such as India, Sri Lanka and the African countries. It was also able to initiate a new form of relationship with Turkey after the visit there of comrade Bakr in 1972.

In its non-alignment policy, Iraq has always tried, when the opportunity presented itself, to stress the Party's principles on this. Positive neutrality and non-alignment are seen in the context of freedom and a progressive, democratic and anti-imperialist right to choose. Iraq has taken part in all the moves to strengthen this policy in international politics and to encourage the movement for non-alignment. It has taken part in the preparatory meetings for these conferences, and, as in Algiers in 1973, in the conferences themselves.

Iraq has recognised the People's Republic of Bangladesh and exchanged diplomatic representatives. It has supported its application for membership of the non-aligned countries and of the United Nations. A trade agreement, the first between Bangladesh and an Arab country has been signed, and the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs visited Iraq during 1974.

Relationships with Yugo-Slavia are marked by friendship, respect and mutual understanding, especially since Yugo-Slavia is a prominent member of the group of non-aligned countries. These have been expanded in every sphere since the 1974 visit of comrade Saddam Hussein, Deputy Secretary of the Regional Directorate and Vice-President of the Revolution Command Council.

Relations with France in the economic, technical and cultural fields have developed considerably on account of her positive attitude to the nation's main causes, especially that of Palestine. The visit to France of comrade Saddam Hussein in 1972 played an important part in this development.

Relations with many African countries have been enlarged in recent years. Visits at various levels and in various spheres have been exchanged and cultural and economic agreements signed with Somalia, the Central African Republic and Chad.

Diplomatic and economic relations have been established for the first time with Latin American countries such as Cuba, Venezuela and Brazil.

Iraq's revolutionary progress has instigated many intrigues by its adversaries, most of which were foiled at an early stage and the others when they were being attempted. The most serious was that of January 20th. 1970, fomented by imperialism and reaction, and the

criminal attack of June 30th. 1973, organised by certain members of the Secret Service. These took advantage of the confidence placed in them for the technical arrangements by the Party, and entered into a conspiracy. They succeeded in assassinating comrade Hamad Shihab, a member of the Revolution Command Council and Minister of Defence, as well as several others.

When the 8th. Regional Congress met in Baghdad between January 8th.-12th. 1974, it already had behind it a rich experience of militancy in many fields and on many levels. It passed judgement on this experience by underlining the positive aspects, criticising the mistakes and shortcomings, and sketching the broad outlines of the Party's future policy and the tasks which lay ahead in the next phase.

After the 8th. Congress, Iraq began to play a more effective part on the Arab and international scene. Its leaders made frequent visits to the progressive Arab countries and to friendly countries throughout the world. It took part in the 7th. Arab Summit Conference in Rabat on December 26th. 1974 and explained clearly the revolutionary and realistic principles upon which the Party was based in Iraq. She had become the magnet, official and unofficial, for many leaders, movements, organisations and congresses both Arab and international.

As a result of the considerable increase in revenue following the increases in the price of oil, Iraq in 1974 made enormous progress in her economic and social development. Laws were passed on February 7th. which increased salaries and reduced the price of services with a consequent rise in the standard of living, especially for the working class. Iraqi and Arab scientific specialists

were invited to serve Iraq and were provided with ample facilities.

During the same period, the country became more involved in Arab common economic projects, regarded as being one of the solid bases for unity. The decision to finance industrial projects in common with Egypt, Syria and other Arab countries was the best way by which Iraq could express its vision of unity and the maturity of the Party in its Arab policy, without being concerned with the differences between the regimes.

The Party's National Activities (July 1968-1974)

The revolution of July 17th. and 30th. in Iraq was the most spectacular Party action on the Arab and international political scene, and an example of its militant existence on the pan-Arab level. In other countries, however, the militants were no less active in continuing the struggle, in deepening the roots of the Party among the masses and in pursuing their national mission of confrontation with imperialism, division, exploitation and the dictatorial and reactionary regimes.

In Syria, despite the difficult conditions facing the Party as a result of the repression and confusion instigated by the regime which continued to use falsely the name and slogans of the Party, the militants pursued the struggle against the dictatorship which had surrendered the country's rights. In May 1970, the regime began a wave of arrests of militant civilian and military members of the Party, and forced others to leave the country. They were brought before so-called courts, in August 1971, accused of plotting against the govern-

ment. The sentences went from the death penalty to life imprisonment or imprisonment for a period for a large number of militants, the elite of the Party, including the founder and General Secretary, comrade Michel 'Aflaq.

Protests came from all sides, from the progressive and patriotic movements in Syria and abroad and even from some members of the regime itself. The Chief of State had to suspend the sentences in the following November.

Despite the political changes taking place on the Arab scene; especially in Syria, and despite the October war and its repercussions on the regime, the prisoners were not released. During the war itself, the appeals of imprisoned Ba'thist officers to be allowed to help defend their country were not answered.

When it became clear that the regime was collaborating with the imperialist plans to force capitulation on the Arabs, people's hopes, in Syria, were placed more and more in the Party. Arab and international public opinion discovered daily the long term aims of the plot which had been hatched against the Party ever since February 23rd. 1966. The militants on more than one occasion after the October war, succeeded in breaking the ring of terror surrounding the people and in distributing tracts in the universities, schools and town districts. This only increased the ferocity of the repression, because occasionally the regime suspected the loyalty of certain members of its own civilian and military organisations, which were then accused of having been in contact with the Party.

In Jordan, the Party went into retreat for a time as did the majority of the national movement following the September massacres and the liquidation of the Resis-

tance in 1970 and 1971. The impact of its ideas and programmes remained, however, and the authorities from time to time arrested militants and accused them of being members of the Party's secret organisation. Other operations were mounted to isolate the Ba'th youth both materially and psychologically.

Before the massacres took place, the Party had established a close union with the Resistance. It tried to extend its activities amongst the Jordanian people in order to foil the enemy's regionally based plan to divide it, even though the long term dangers of this were underestimated by certain Resistance leaders.

In 1969 and 1970, the Jordanian Party carried considerable weight amongst the workers and students, joining the struggle of the cement workers as well as in other sectors. It continued to play a part in other associations such as those of the lawyers, chemists, doctors and engineers.

Just at the time when the Party had been able to reorganise itself in order the better to carry out its tasks, the September massacres hit at the heart of the Resistance and the national movement. It should be mentioned here that it was difficult, and in the Lebanon also, to distinguish between the struggle led by the Ba'th and that of the Arab Liberation Front. The latter had been founded at the beginning of January 1969 on the Party's initiative and in accordance with the 9th. National Congress resolutions. Its aim was to intensify its activities by resorting to a people's armed struggle, and to widen the Arab national dimension of the Resistance which sometimes became extremely localised.

The Arab Liberation Front appeared on the battlefield in April 1969, and began its first operations on the

anniversary of the Party's foundation. It thus became a vehicle through which the Ba'th could participate in fedayeen operations and attempt to influence certain errors of theory, practice and organisation of these operations.

When in Amman, the Front reinforced the national unity of various Resistance elements and played an important role in the struggle with Israel and the reactionary Jordanian conspiracy. Many Arabs from different countries fell during these operations.

While the September massacres were going on, the fighters of the Front fought effectively against the government troops, and defended several districts of Amman. After September, the Front harassed the regime with a series of blows which led it to step up its campaign against the militants and their leaders. It also firmly opposed the decision of the Resistance Central Committee to evacuate Amman and take to the maquis. There they were surrounded and massacred, and the Resistance ceased to exist in Jordan.

In the Lebanon, the Front effectively organised military operations against the enemy and resisted Zionist raids on the Lebanon on every occasion, especially on May 12th. 1970 when it lost four militants, and in September 1972 when three others were killed.

The Front collaborated closely with the Party in preparing the Palestinian and Lebanese people for the fight by training and arming them. The Front and the Party were therefore able to play an important part in resisting the plots hatched against the Resistance after it had become established in the country, notably in April 1969, March 1970 and May 1973.

After several years of struggle, the Front held it

foundation congress in August 1972. Questions of military and political organisation were discussed and a Central Committee elected. This was the beginning of a new phase and was a reflection of the Front's growing importance on the Palestinian scene. At the beginning of January 1973, the National Palestine Council even adopted a project put forward by the Front, which meant that it was fully integrated into the Resistance's institutions.

During the October war, the fighters and members of the Front's popular organisations took part in operations against the enemy on the Lebanese front. A number were even sent to Syria despite the ban on their operating on Syrian territory. They also helped to reinforce the Palestinian position when it was faced with certain proposals for a solution. In this context it joined with similar organisations in rejecting all capitulation proposals for disposing of the Palestine question.

A notable action of the Front after the October war was in the preparation for a Unity March by the people to Damascus and Baghdad in support of union between Iraq and Syria. At the last moment, it was banned by the Syrian government, thereby showing its real attitude towards the union of the two countries.

The Party's main activities in the Lebanon at this time were concentrated on the close association with the Palestine Resistance both before and after its establishment on Lebanese soil. In this way it could give living, tangible proof of the close connection between the fight for freedom and that for the setting up of a democratic society, which was the immediate objective in the Lebanon, following the decisions of the 12th. regional congress held at the end of October 1968. For the first time in the history of the Lebanese Party, there was discussion

of reports and studies which had been carried out on the political, economic and cultural aspects of Lebanese society. After examination and discussion, the congress drew up a plan for national action which the Party suggested should be incorporated in a charter for the creation of a national people's Front in the Lebanon.

This regional congress took place shortly before the first groups of fedayeen moved into the southern part of the Lebanon. The Party's and Lebanese national movement's first task was to protect these first arrivals. At the end of the summer of 1968, the Party took the initiative in forming the Arab People's Front with object of supporting these units. The Front included the Progressive Socialist Party, Fath members and independent progressives. This was the nucleus of what became later known as the Associated Arab Front which held its first congress in Lebanon in November 1972, and its general assembly in Algeria at the end of December 1974, attended by the Ba'th National Directorate.

The demonstrations on the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration in 1968 provided the opportunity for the Lebanese national movement and the Party to express support for the fedayeen and the need for its protection. This led to armed clashes with right wing elements in certain Lebanese universities. The government, as a result of its own internal contradictions, was compelled to suspend action against the fedayeen until April 1969. It then attempted to liquidate the Resistance in the south. The Party and national movements organised violent demonstrations on April 23rd. and 24th. 1969, during which dozens of people were killed. The government resigned and the political crisis went on for several months. It only ended in October after a series of

confrontations between the authorities and the Palestinian Resistance in alliance with the national movement.

The Cairo agreement then authorised the official presence of the Palestinian fedayeen on Lebanese soil, and removed the refugee camps from Lebanese government control and placed them under Palestinian administration. Despite its limitations and attached conditions, the agreement crowned the victory of the Lebanese people's movement. It was then that the doors were open for mass action in a democratic atmosphere, of which the most visible signs were the possibility for the progressive parties to militate in the open after they had been given the permission in August 1970.

The agreement still did not prevent repeated attempts being made to stir up trouble. In March 1970, the right launched an operation which failed immediately, and the Party played an important part, politically and militarily, in foiling it. But the most serious attack on the fedayeen was in May 1973. The Party had to come out armed on to the streets to defend the Resistance; its part in checking this new plot was so evident that the people turned more and more resolutely towards it.

The close alliance between the Party and the Resistance was not restricted to protecting it against the regime, but also in resisting Israeli attacks on the Lebanon, especially in the south. After the attacks, hundreds of young people from all parts of the country went to the south in the Party's name, to take up arms at their brothers' sides. This happened particularly in May 1970, February, March and September 1972, and during the October war of 1973. The Ba'thists resisted Israeli raids on the frontier villages on many occasions. The most notable was the battle of Tayyiba on New Year's

Day 1975, when Party militants were killed when resisting a large Israeli unit which had attacked the village.

The Party was the first Lebanese movement to raise the question of the south. In the light of the government's almost total abnegation of its military, political and social responsibilities, the Party emphasised the need to support the inhabitants and provide them with the means to face up to Israeli attacks. So at the end of 1969, it issued invitations to attend a national Conference for the support of the south. Invited were the progressive movements and parties, and certain practical steps were considered such as the construction of bomb shelters in the frontier villages and social and economic measures which would enable the inhabitants to remain in them.

However, the slowness of certain national elements in playing their part in the Conference held the project up for several years. In October 1972, the Party relaunched it with the collaboration of several Lebanese national organisations. The Conference started the work on the shelters, dispensaries and schools, issued grants and took care of all the problems in the south.

One of the most important aspects of the Party's concern for the South-Lebanon question was the spectacular way in which it led the uprising of the peasant tobacco growers against the Monopoly, during the course of which several demonstrators were killed. The matter was then taken up on a national scale in all circles.

In the Lebanon, the Party operated also on the national level in opposing the imperialist manoeuvres and capitulation plans, and in this way went far beyond the country's frontiers. On May 2nd. 1971, the Party organised protest demonstrations in the Lebanon and the

region against the American Secretary of State, Rogers; several of the main progressive organisations abstained from these. Through its young feminine organisation, the Party joined the women's demonstration against the visit of king Feisal on September 28th. of the same year. This was also its main instrument for protesting, by student demonstrations, against the American diplomats' visits after the October war, and it was the Party which organised the sucess of the large demonstrations on Kissinger's first visit to the region in December 1973.

Party action in the Lebanon was principally involved with local affairs, mainly social, and with the educational problem. In Tripoli, the Party was behind a widespread public agitation against the electricity monopoly «Qadisha», and by employing various means conducted an effective fight. It also led the struggle in several regions, factories ans city districts. The most important of these took place when the Baalbek town council was dissolved in the summer of 1972. Its president was one of the leading comrades and was daily carrying out important work amongst the people. The dissolution caused an explosion of the populace which paralysed the town for two days, during which there were many demonstrations. The Party also led the revolt in the Hermel region to reclaim its essential rights.

Young Ba'thists were the pillars of support for the many student agitations in the Lebanon at this time, taking part in the national organisation, «The Students Fight», or as members of the student unions in the colleges and universities. The uprising in the American University in 1974 was an extension of its long struggle against imperialist cultural institutions. In its famous manifesto, in the name of the «Youth of the American

University», in March 1967, it had demanded its Leba-nisation.

In 1973 and 1974, the Party led the struggle against rising prices, bread in particular. In March 1974, it succeeded in breaking a baker's strike which was demanding a price increase. The Party set up people's committees in Beirut and other areas which took over the bakeries, baked the bread and distributed it to the population.

Side by side with the comrades in Iraq, the Party led the struggle against the oil monopolies in the Lebanon. It organised rallies and national conferences in support of Iraq. When nationalization was proclaimed, it led huge demonstrations of approval in Beirut and other towns. It also supported the nationalization of the I.P.C. pipelines, contrary to the Lebanese government attitude which sided with the Company against Iraq's interests.

Since conditions in the Lebanon were reasonably democratic, the Party's attitude towards elections was that they were one of the means of fighting on the political front. The election campaign was an opportunity to reveal its programme and to make contact with wide sections of the people. In the Spring of 1968, the Party had not won a seat although its candidate in Tripoli received a larg number of votes, but falsifications and other pressures deprived him of his victory. In the following elections, June 16th. 1972, the Party entered Parliament for the first time in the person of Abd-al-Majid ar-Rafi'i who had won a large number of votes in Tripoli. The Party's campaign in other districts also had a certain amount of success.

In the Sudan, during this period, the Ba'thists successfully disseminated the Party's ideas on socialism

and unity amongst the working people, the students and the intellectuals. Their activities were carried out under difficulty and demanded many sacrifices. They played a noteworthy part in organising the demonstrations at the time of the Arab Summit Meeting in Khartoum after the 1967 defeat, in the many fights for democracy with the reactionary regime which preceded the military movement of May 1969, and in their continuous activities to make this movement more democratic and progressive.

After the setback to the Hashim Ata regime on July 19th. 1971, the government tried to deal the Ba'th a severe blow. It sentenced its most eminent militants and dozens of its members to several years in prison. This did not prevent the Ba'thists from continuing the struggle on the democratic national and especially unitarian socialist levels. During the time of the Hashim Ata movement, the Party lost an eminent comrade, Mohammed Sulayman, a member of the National Directorate, whose aircraft exploded in flight on July 22nd. when he was returning to join his comrades in the Sudan.

In Tunisia, the Party had become a growing political force while leading the student protests of the spring of 1968 against the sentences of their comrades who had led the June demonstrations. As a result, the Tunisian authorities arrested many Party members and started a defamatory campaign in the mass media.

The appearance of the comrades in court was an opportunity to show their determination and to talk about their ideas. Activity continued in Tunisia and included, particularly, the agitation amongst students and certain workers in the autumn of 1970.

The Party had reorganised itself in many countries,

both Arab and foreign, after the disturbances and splits caused by the serious crises which had shaken it on a national level. It was the Party in the Yemen which regained most influence in the country's events. It resisted the reactionaries linked with Saudi Arabia, and constantly moved in the direction of national democracy. For this reason it was the object of a wide reactionary conspiracy to arrest and persecute the Party militants.

The Party's activities overall, were an expression of its national structure and its links with one Directorate which gave it guidance, corrected mistakes, and provided the best conditions for overcoming the difficulties of the struggle. After the revolution of July 17th. and 30th., the National Directorate transferred its headquarters to Baghdad, where conditions were the best for setting up its agencies and offices, centralising its departments and tightening its links with Arab progressive movements and the world socialist and liberation movements. After the return from Brazil of the comrade General Secretary in the autumn of 1969, the Directorate convened the 10th. National Congress for February 1970. The political, organisational and financial reports were discussed and the appropriate decisions taken. The Party's policies on unity, coalition actions, the armed struggle and the rejection of capitulation solutions were confirmed. The main tasks for the Party in Iraq were defined.

Following the 10th. Congress, the National Directorate, in addition to its work with the Party organisations, established and developed relations with the people's movements and parties in the Maghreb and the Mashreq and also with the organisations of the Palestinian Resistance. It made contact with all of them and their leaders and encouraged them to unite and put up a

stronger front for Palestine vis-à-vis the proposals for liquidating it.

At the beginning of 1974, the National Directorate made an agreement with the People's Liberation Front in Oman, underlining the need for unity and cooperation. The comrade General Secretary visited Democratic Yemen once again to reinforce Party links with the Nationalist Front. The Directorate effectively supported the revolution in Eritrea so that it could face up to all the traps which threatened it.

The National Directorate has established close links with all world socialist parties and liberation movements. It has attended their congresses and expressed sympathy with their struggles. Top level visits have been exchanged, especially that to India of the Assistant General Secretary, all of which has provided the basis for relationships between the Arab and world revolutions.

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